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• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Good morning, colleagues.

We are resuming where we left off last Thursday. Mr. Bachrach had the floor. He had just moved a motion.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is still yours.

[English]

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

At the last meeting, I moved a motion, which was put on notice. Perhaps I'll start by repeating it for the folks who are watching.

It reads:

That, given the importance of freshwater ecosystem services to the prosperity, sustainability, and resilience of British Columbian communities, and given the increasingly severe impacts of climate change including drought, wildfires, and floods, the committee urge the federal government to work with the Government of—

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Oh, oh!

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Was it too fast?

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: No. I'm sorry, but I don't think there is any interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: Can we just test this to see if...?

Do you hear me now, Madame Pauzé?

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Yes, we're okay now.

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'll just pick up where I left off, I suppose:

—the committee urge the federal government to work with the Government of British Columbia to establish a \$1 billion watershed security fund; that the Committee report this to the House; and that the government table a written response.

This stemmed from some really compelling testimony that we had from Mr. Zeman, who is the executive director of the B.C. Wildlife Federation. He talked to the committee about how his or-

ganization has been working in partnership with first nations and landowners on hundreds of watershed restoration projects across the province. I think it's some really exciting work.

This uses the term “watershed security” and maybe the best place to start is by talking about what this concept of watershed security is.

What we're talking about when we say “watershed security” is really rebuilding the natural defences of our watersheds. There's so much literature out there on the importance of natural infrastructure. We know that natural systems are some of our best defences against climate change and the extreme weather that we've been seeing more and more.

Watershed security is really about rebuilding those natural defences. It's about bolstering collaborative monitoring by engaging communities and first nations in data collection and going out on the land and to the watersheds to observe what's happening, so that we are better informed and better able to respond when things change. It's about strengthening watershed governance in partnership with the provinces, first nations and local governments.

In British Columbia, there's been a long history of this work. The opportunity right now is really to bring some significant resources to bear, so that the organizations and communities that want to do this work are supported by the federal government.

This has huge potential for job creation. We're talking about the potential for thousands of well-paid jobs in communities. Some of this work is already taking place.

We know that the cost of not doing this is also very significant. In British Columbia, people are well aware of the devastating impacts of wildfires over the past number of years, the flooding and the atmospheric river that hit the Lower Mainland and caused extensive damage. We do have the potential to mitigate these effects if we act swiftly and if we put in place the structures that are required to bolster natural infrastructure and make sure that our watersheds are resilient.

In British Columbia, top of mind for many folks is the health of wild salmon stocks. This work around resilience and building watershed security also has the benefit of protecting and enhancing our wild salmon, which are so important to our economy and to first nations.

That really gets to the heart of what this motion is about.

The Government of B.C. has already invested over \$100 million in watershed security. The potential here is to build that into a \$1-billion fund. It's not with the federal government contributing the balance, but with a sizable matching contribution from the federal government, increased contributions from the provincial government and the leveraging of private investment as well. Together, these three parties could put together the funds to really sustain this work into the future.

I know this is an initiative that the B.C. government is very excited about. First nations are very excited about it. When we talk about climate change and securing watersheds, it's relatively rare that we get such broad support from across all the different sectors—from different governments and across the political spectrum. When we see that kind of alignment, I think it really behooves us to get behind those efforts and support them with significant resources.

That's why I'm excited about this. It's why I brought forward the motion after Mr. Zeman's testimony before the committee.

I know we're going to have other witnesses who appear before this committee on this study. We did hear from Watersheds B.C. at our last meeting.

• (1105)

I know, unfortunately, the witness's testimony was cut short. I wasn't able to ask the questions that I wanted to ask of the witness, but hopefully the presentation that she made had an impact on the committee. Hopefully we'll hear from more folks from my home province who are passionate about this work.

My hope today is that we can debate this motion and hopefully pass it so that the government can know that the committee supports moving forward with this vision. I think it's a really positive vision. I think it could have a tremendous impact on the province of British Columbia and the watersheds that sustain our communities.

Mr. Chair, I'll leave it at that for now. Perhaps I can offer some more thoughts later in the debate.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. van Koeverden, Mr. Mazier, Mr. Longfield and Madame Chatel.

Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I start, I'll ask Mr. Bachrach if there has been anything modified? Have there been any changes to it?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: No, there haven't.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: As we discussed, we are in favour of this motion as it's written. We would like one small change and that's just to provide a written report and basically remove the section on reporting it to the House. All in all, we're very supportive of it.

There are a couple of things I wanted to talk about with respect to this motion in the context of our debate in the last couple of meetings. I'll touch on the constitutionality of looking at water-

sheds. I think we're all aware of the hydrological cycle and how water travels across borders and knows no boundaries, and the importance of ensuring that we are protecting our most vital resource, both in British Columbia and elsewhere.

I'll provide a reflection on Ontario's maintenance of our greatest natural resource, which is fresh water. These are my personal reflections, not necessarily professional ones. I'm not a scientist, but we have had some really great water scientists here at this committee recently and my observation as somebody who spends a lot of time on the water in Ontario is that we're really lucky to have conservation areas. We're really lucky to have conservation authorities doing the work to do the science, collect the data, look at restoration and develop a base of knowledge around endangered and threatened species.

Just recently in the new Parks Canada development at Rouge National Urban Park, we visited an organic farm that was having some problems with their water table. They were finding that every spring they weren't able to start planting until later in the season than some of their neighbours. The conservation authority came by and determined that, if the creek that runs adjacent to the property ran a little bit slower for one reason or another, their water table would dry up just a little bit earlier in the spring and they'd be able to plant three to four weeks earlier. They did this restoration project and not only did this provide better drainage for the fields, which are in excess of 30 to 40 acres—they plant tonnes and tonnes of varieties of vegetables—but they also found that there were fish species and turtles and frogs that moved into this little area just adjacent to their farm. Since it's an organic farm, they had no concerns about any sort of contamination or anything like that.

Conservation authorities do fantastic work.

When posed with the question, why British Columbia? Obviously, my colleague is from British Columbia, but the question might arise, why is this more of a priority for British Columbia than for others? I would say that it's also a priority for Ontario, but we have an asset and that asset is our conservation authorities. The science and the work that they do in tree planting and in habitat restoration are really extraordinary.

We're entering into the holiday season and people are starting to put up their Christmas trees. I don't know if anybody else on the committee has had this experience in their local community, but in Halton, Conservation Halton actually asks you to drop off your Christmas tree after the season. Take the tinsel and all the decorations off obviously, but the Christmas trees are really useful for habitat restoration to create berms and to provide a barrier between the different species.

I visited the Royal Botanical Gardens between Hamilton and Burlington recently and found that they were using their Christmas trees to do that work. I actually saw this huge line of discarded Christmas trees that were providing a barrier and habitat restoration. They're just doing extraordinary work.

We're lucky in Ontario that we have these conservation authorities, but it's something I think other provinces could emulate. I do think that we're lucky in Ontario.

Moving on to the constitutionality of looking into pollution and looking into how pollution impacts our communities, but particularly indigenous communities, something that was raised by my colleagues from the Conservative Party.... I was told to consider running, and I think we were all told to consider perhaps running in Albertan politics if we are concerned about Alberta's pollution and the impacts of it on the population of Alberta.

• (1110)

Now, I'm concerned about pollution outside of Halton region, not just because I'm concerned about all Canadians but because I also know that pollution knows no boundaries. It doesn't care about borders. Pollution in Halton, whether it's airborne or water-borne, will enter water systems, and those water systems will then have an impact further down the water cycle on millions of people.

I did spend some time reflecting on the comments with respect to whether or not it was useful for a committee in the federal government to study pollution specific to one particular region, or to call on an energy regulator from one particular province to change its behaviour, modify its practices or reconsider its work a bit. I did look, and I provided my colleague from the Conservative Party with an email regarding the federal subject matters.

They're very explicit. It's very clear to me that our study is with respect to our jurisdiction, and we are well within our rights and our domains to look at how pollution impacts various communities, but specifically indigenous communities. That's because federal matters can include—I'll just read it—as the basis of most federal jurisdiction over environmental issues, public property, which means federally owned public property—

• (1115)

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, for how long do the Liberals plan on filibustering?

The Chair: I don't know exactly where this is heading. I'm just wondering. I do question a little bit the relevance of the comments.

Mr. van Koeverden, maybe you could explain how this connects to Mr. Bachrach's motion. I saw a hint of that when we talked about watersheds and pollution from the sky that gets into a watershed. In fact, when we were studying the oil sands, the development in 2007—I keep going back to that—one of the vectors in the study was the notion that pollution from the industry was going into the air and getting into the water through the air, as opposed to seeping into the water from tailings ponds.

It is relevant in that respect, but for a good chunk of what you're saying I'm not sure how it connects. I'd like to give you the opportunity to maybe say how it connects to the motion.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Certainly.

Mr. Bachrach's motion makes recommendations for one province, British Columbia. We recently had an energy regulator from another province, Alberta, and the question was raised by some members of the Conservative Party as to whether or not we ought to even be in the business of making recommendations to provincial authorities. I think we ought to be.

We ought to recognize that every province is quite different with respect to how it does this work. I gave some examples about Ontario. I apologize if my stories were a little bit long. I went for a nice long run this morning. I'm quite relaxed and feeling very zen, so perhaps I'll try to tighten up my comments a little bit.

I do think it is pertinent to really consider that Canada is basically 13 countries. It tries really hard to be one, and we achieve that—Canada's a great country—but we're very unique in the context that there really isn't that much connecting maybe the economy of the Yukon to the economy of Prince Edward Island.

By the same token, with respect to Mr. Bachrach's motion, we are, through this motion, making recommendations or considering one province above all others, above all 12 of the other provinces and territories. In the previous work we've undertaken with respect to the Alberta Energy Regulator, it was proposed that perhaps if we want to be making recommendations to one specific province, we should get involved in provincial or territorial politics.

I don't think that's necessary, for the following reasons. Federal subject matters can include public property, which means federally owned property, which could include parkland or Crown land; fisheries, both marine and fresh water; navigation and shipping; anything with respect to criminal law; or any issue that impacts first nations people.

In this very old document—I should read it verbatim, although it uses old language that we've updated. It says, “Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians.” Of course, we recognize that's outdated language that we don't use anymore.

In addition to that, the opening words of section 91 of the Constitution Act of 1867 set out federal residual power, which numerous legal decisions have interpreted to mean that various subject matters not explicitly listed in the Constitution, such as marine pollution and interprovincial water pollution, are nevertheless all within federal jurisdiction. Therefore, it's very clear that we have the jurisdiction, that we have the actual authority and that we, as a federal government but also as a committee of this government, have an obligation to look at marine pollution and interprovincial water pollution.

That, to me, means that—

Mr. Dan Mazier: On a point of order, I really do wonder how long he's going to filibuster. We're talking about water ecosystems and not about pollution. If he refers to the motion, he'll see that there's nothing about pollution at all.

The Chair: Pollution is an issue within ecosystems, of course.

Mr. Dan Mazier: It's not about the motion though.

The Chair: I agree that it's—

Mr. Dan Mazier: As long as he can keep his filibuster to the comments there, that will be fine.

The Chair: I agree that it's getting far removed from the motion.

I would ask again, Mr. van Koeverden, that you maybe narrow the focus a little bit.

• (1120)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: My reflection was less on whether or not the pollution with respect to the ecosystem was something we ought to be considering and more about whether or not it should be one specific province.

My amendment was simply about how we deal with the information we're going to gather and then provide to the government, and what we expect in return. That's it.

I agree with the notion that our committee ought to have the latitude to make recommendations to one specific province or multiple provinces at any given time, because I think, with respect to pollution, with respect to ecosystems, with respect to water or with respect to indigenous peoples, specifically first nations, it's quite pertinent to the jurisdiction of our federal government but also to the topics that this committee is to look at.

The issue I was focused on, which I will continue to focus on for a moment, was whether or not our committee ought to be looking at particular provinces. I continue to be of the strong opinion that any conduct of the Alberta Energy Regulator, and whether or not it can do its work—

The Chair: I have a point of order from Mr. Leslie.

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): My colleague across the way said he planned to support the motion with an amendment. I'm just wondering how long he plans to speak in broad, general terms without actually moving the amendment so we can move forward with committee business.

The Chair: I don't think that's a point of order. It's an opinion or a question, but not a point of order.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you.

I think it's important that we know what the guardrails of our work are.

In the last meeting, it was called into question whether or not we ought to make recommendations to one specific province. At that time, it was Alberta. I sensed a little bit of defensiveness from my Conservative colleagues with respect to Alberta. We can use our imaginations as to why that might be the case, but the fact remains that, if we're going to have a look at whether or not we ought to do something similar with British Columbia—

The Chair: Is there a point of order?

Mr. Dan Mazier: I really do take offence to that. I'm not from Alberta. I stand up for all the provinces in Canada.

The Chair: That's a point of offence. It's not a point of order.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I apologize if I offended anybody, but I do sense occasionally that there are members of certain parties that are—and they may applaud when I say it—more ardently opposed to any action that might limit the ability of oil and gas companies and energy companies to do their work in the same way that they have been doing it.

That's problematic because, as we heard from the Alberta Energy Regulator, it's just not working. People are being negatively impacted by the pollution caused through these massive oil and gas extraction projects. I think it is certainly part of our work to be focused on it.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I have a point of order.

Really, are you still filibustering? Let's get back to the motion. We need to get this—

The Chair: Again, it's not a point of order.

Mr. Dan Mazier: It's not relevant. Talking about a—

The Chair: You're questioning relevance.

I've asked Mr. van Koeverden to narrow the focus now. I don't think there's any issue with the federal government focusing on a particular province. We come to agreements with provinces all the time. We do this in agriculture, which is kind of a joint jurisdiction.

Anyway, Mr. van Koeverden, go ahead, but please mind the guardrails on this.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you.

I would just observe that I was only responding to the point of order from my colleague when I got point of order again saying that I ought to stay on topic, so I will try to stay on topic with respect to this motion in particular.

With that, I think I will table the amendment. It's that we simply drop the clause in there about...

Mr. Bachrach, if you'll indulge me, because I don't have it in front of me. Perhaps it's a friendly amendment if we can simply drop the section that says we report this to the House. It would be, "with the Government of British Columbia to establish a \$1 billion watershed security fund; and that the government table a written response."

Does everybody agree?

The Chair: I don't have the text in front of me. I do actually, but let me just....

Can you just tell us what the amendment is? Could you just spell it out again?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Perhaps I'll just read it from the beginning.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: The amended motion would read, "That, given the importance of freshwater ecosystem services to the prosperity, sustainability, and resilience of British Columbian communities, and given the increasingly severe impacts of climate change including drought, wildfires, and floods, the committee urge the federal government to work with the Government of British Columbia to establish a \$1 billion watershed security fund; and that the government table a written response."

• (1125)

The Chair: You're taking out "that the Committee report this to the House". That's the amendment.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Yes. This is just committee business, and I think the committee ought to make that recommendation on its own two feet.

The Chair: This is an amendment to the motion that we can now debate.

Does anyone want to speak to this? If there's general agreement to doing this, we don't have to have a big debate on it.

How do you feel about this?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Chair, through you to Mr. van Koeverden, thanks for the amendment.

I do favour the idea of reporting to the House and having the government table a written response, but really the goal here is to try to build support around the table to get this motion passed and to speak as a committee. If Mr. van Koeverden feels that striking the one clause of the motion will bring him on board and allow him and his colleagues to support the motion, I'm happy to do that.

I think the important thing is that we have the debate and that, as a committee, we're able to express it to the government, even if we're not tabling it in the House formally. I would hope that they're listening intently to our deliberations today. Of course, we have the parliamentary secretary here contributing to that debate. I think that's the key thing.

I'm happy to either accept it as a friendly amendment, or we can vote on it. Maybe a vote would be more appropriate, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, it's pretty substantive.

Do we have any other speakers on this amendment? Can we just vote on it?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Can we have the amendment read back?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Actually, Mr. van Koeverden's amendment is just to delete the words "that the Committee report this to the House".

Can we vote on that?

[*English*]

Does anyone object to this?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: As indicated, I object, but in the interest of building consensus, if it's unanimous I'm not going to stand in the way of—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Let me put it this way. Hypothetically, if we had a vote, would you vote for this amendment?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'm inclined to vote against it because I like the idea of tabling it in the House.

The Chair: Okay. We're going to have a vote.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I think there are enough votes to—

The Chair: We're going to have a vote. Let's have a vote and get it on the record.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 10; nays 1)

The Chair: We go back to the main motion.

I have a whole list of people on the main motion. I want to make sure that everyone wants to remain on the list.

I have Mr. Mazier, Mr. Longfield, Madame Chatel, Madame Pauzé and Mr. Bachrach on the main motion as amended.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Yes, and I think it's very good.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach, for bringing this motion forward.

Getting back to his original inaugural speech when we kicked off this committee meeting, he touched on a lot of different keywords in terms of "rebuilding the natural defences" versus man-made defences—I think that's really good language—and the things to be working on in general when it comes to landscape management. Also, "watershed security" is another good term. I like that one, and "watershed governance". I think the reality is that the salmon stocks, of course, are always important to B.C.

Regarding "job creation", I think that's the only one I was questioning when reflecting on what you had to say. It was on creating the jobs, the jobs that are going to be created out of that. Maybe he can comment a bit more on this. Is it that there are going to be government jobs at the end of the day, or are those people going to be creating more things at the end of the day to contribute to our gross domestic product?

I think that has always been a conversation when we come down to managing the landscape and talking about conservation. Is it really a new job, or is it just a matter of "this is how mankind is going to live on the landscape and we need these kinds of jobs"?

I don't know if I would hang my hat on the job creation part of it, but as far as the rest of what this fund would do goes, and what all the things are that need to be addressed on the landscape, I think it's a good motion. I think we should vote on it.

The Chair: We can't vote because we have a list.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Okay.

• (1130)

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Longfield, then Madame Chatel, Madame Pauzé, Mr. Bachrach and Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

I will be very brief, although I do want to mention that the Christmas tree program we have in Guelph is "Trees for Tots", and it's run by the children's foundation to raise money for school programs for kids in Guelph. They raise about \$60,000 a year by having 300 volunteers collecting holiday trees and then mulching them. The mulch goes into community gardens in Guelph, so there is an environmental impact there that's beneficial for our community, and it gets 300 volunteers out doing great things for the kids in our community.

To go back to the motion, though, I have only one comment. The \$1 billion kind of hit me. I think we might be getting operational there. I don't know whether \$1 billion is enough, or if it's too much or how we come to defend \$1 billion. I know it's significant, and it should be a significant fund, but I would drop the \$1 billion and just establish a watershed security fund.

The Chair: You're proposing an amendment.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Yes, because it might not be enough, and it might be too much. I don't know.

The Chair: Do you see this as a friendly amendment, Mr. Bachrach?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Yes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I'm not trying to put a stick in your spokes.

The Chair: We'll debate the \$1 billion now. Does anyone want to talk about the \$1 billion?

Go ahead, Mr. Bachrach.

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

Through you to Mr. Longfield, indeed, it might not be enough. The hope would be that it would grow beyond \$1 billion, because the need is so great. Look at some of the watersheds that have been impacted in British Columbia and need restoration, especially the Fraser, which is the largest river system in our province. It has seen tremendous development impacts over many years. It's also seen natural impacts.

Look at the Big Bar slide just a couple of years ago that almost entirely blocked the Fraser River and caused major implications for wild salmon. Look at the lower Fraser River in the Fraser Valley, where the flooding we saw last year occurred. A lot of the impact on ecosystems that we saw was a result of development over time that hasn't taken into account the impact on natural systems.

There's a tremendous opportunity there to restore those ecosystems and rebuild the natural resilience. It's going to take a serious commitment, probably beyond what's articulated here.

The billion-dollar number comes directly from Mr. Zeman's presentation. I think it's based on, if I recall, a \$400-million contribution from the province, an equal \$400-million contribution from the federal government and \$200 million that would be leveraged from private investors.

I'll look for the chair's indulgence if I just stray down a slight side path here to address one of Mr. Mazier's earlier points about job creation. I think the potential of this fund is that, if the federal government makes a substantive investment, there's the potential to leverage investment from the private sector. When we talk about job creation and economic development, leveraging private investment is often an important part of the conversation.

Now we're talking about—

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: You've convinced me.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Have I convinced you already? I'm just getting warmed up.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: No, your first part of the explanation—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I had you at hello. Okay.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I can withdraw my amendment.

The Chair: Okay. We'll go back to the main motion. I have Madame Chatel, Madame Pauzé, Mr. Bachrach and Mr. van Koverden.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Chatel, you have the floor on the main motion as amended.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would suggest two things.

First of all, Mr. Bachrach, I was wondering if it would be possible to highlight in your motion something you talked about. After the part that says “establish a \$1 billion watershed security fund”, I propose to add, in brackets, that it be “composed of investments from the federal and provincial governments and the private sector”. You could use the term “capital” or you could use the term “investments”. Indeed, it should be clearly stated that it would consist of funds from the provincial and federal governments, but also from the private sector, because that is a very interesting aspect of this fund. Government resources are limited and this work must be done in partnership. So it would be important to highlight that aspect. That's my first suggestion.

Second, I propose adding in brackets after that, “and to work with provinces that would like to implement a similar fund”. That way, it wouldn't only be for British Columbia, and we would open the door to a discussion between the federal government and the other provinces that would like to establish a similar fund. I think your idea is interesting, Mr. Bachrach, and I would like it to inspire the other provinces as well.

• (1135)

The Chair: Okay.

Could you read the wording of your proposed amendment?

[*English*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I'm happy to also say it in English. After the “\$1 billion watershed security fund”, open a bracket and say, “made of investment from the federal, provincial and private sector”. That would be the first amendment.

The Chair: Okay, so after “security fund”, it would be, “made of...”.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: It would be “made of investment from the federal, provincial and private sector”. Maybe “government” is missing there.

The Chair: It's “the federal and provincial governments”—

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Yes...and the private sector.

The Chair: We're going to debate this. Who would like to speak to this?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'm happy to accept the amendment, Mr. Chair, or to support the amendment. I'm just wondering about the wording: “made from”, “made of”, “made up of”—

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I would say, “made up of”.

[*Translation*]

In French, it would read, “composé de”.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I just think that if we can get the grammar in English a little closer, that would be—

The Chair: It would be “composed of investments from the federal and provincial governments and the private sector”.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Are we agreed on “to work with the Government of British Columbia to establish a \$1 billion watershed security fund, composed of investments from the federal and provincial governments and the private sector” or something like that?

The Chair: I don't think you even need the comma.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Maybe we don't even need a comma. We could save that for some other....

The Chair: Either way, it's good. That is Madame Chatel's proposed amendment.

Mr. Bachrach, was that what you wanted to say?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I just want to be clear on the words, on the language. I'm happy with that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Is there anyone else?

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I simply want to say that I will be voting against this amendment, because every time the federal government puts money in, it imposes its conditions.

The Chair: Okay.

So can we go to a vote on Mrs. Chatel's amendment?

[*English*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Natalie Jeanneault): We're voting on the amendment of Madame Chatel to add, “composed of investments from the federal and provincial governments and the private sector”.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Now we go back to the main motion as amended.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: There was another amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Pardon?

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Yes, Mr. Chair, I moved two amendments, but only one was voted on.

The Chair: Okay. I didn't know you had two. The floor is yours.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: The second one is perhaps just a friendly amendment. Immediately after what was just added by the previous amendment, I would like to add “and to work with other provinces that would like to implement a similar fund”. That wording could be preceded by a comma. So the motion would not be specific to

British Columbia. As I said, it's a very good idea, and I think it could inspire the other provinces.

• (1140)

The Chair: Okay.

Is a debate really necessary or can we proceed to a vote?

There doesn't seem to be any debate, so let's vote on the second amendment proposed by Mrs. Chatel.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: We're back to the main motion as amended previously.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'll give you a general explanation of why we are opposed to the motion. Obviously, there is a financial issue, but there is also a jurisdictional issue.

We're talking about a \$1 billion fund to which British Columbia will contribute \$100 million or \$200 million, and to which the federal government will then contribute. Will we also have \$1 billion for our watersheds in Quebec, given our wealth of water? To give you an idea, I would point out that all the lakes and rivers in Quebec cover three times the size of France. So water is a great asset in Quebec, although it's affected by pollution problems related to industrialization, of course, but that's another discussion.

Quebec created its national water policy in 2002, under Bernard Landry's government. It was the result of initiatives such as the Legendre commission in 1970, watershed management experiments, the Environmental Conservation Council in 1993, the Water Management Symposium in Quebec in 1997 and the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement report in 1999–2000. Through all of this, the Government of Quebec has placed watershed organizations at the centre of the water governance model. This is squarely in the area of jurisdiction.

The topic of this study, fresh water, is already a bit of a jurisdictional issue. However, Mr. Bachrach's motion is squarely within provincial jurisdiction. Despite Mr. van Koevorden's explanations, I remain opposed to this motion, for the reasons I gave earlier. This is about respect for jurisdictions, which is a crucial and topical issue in this country.

The federal government, through its spending power, is already meddling in everything. It wants its own programs, its own priorities, its own standards, and the provinces take turns giving in to get the money. As a result, the real autonomy of the provinces is shrinking. Mr. Bachrach's motion makes it even smaller. As we know, a number of provinces are expressing the same frustrations as Quebec regarding federal interference at the moment. There was a time when we were the only ones expressing it, but now Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, New Brunswick and Alberta are too.

So, for all these reasons relating to the famous federal spending power, we are going to vote against Mr. Bachrach's motion.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Bachrach.

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate what Madame Pauzé has offered. I think the potential here, though, is really to create a model based on a province that is already creating that model. It's to come in as a federal partner, which is something the federal government does all the time.

I somewhat reluctantly voted against Ms. Chatel's amendment to encourage the federal government to work with other provinces that are also interested in setting up such funds, but I think the potential here is really to augment and to amplify the work that's already going on in British Columbia and to create a model that can then be rolled out across the country.

The significance of British Columbia.... This comes back to a question that Mr. van Koeverden asked in his opening remarks: Why B.C.? The fresh water action plan that the federal government put in place in 2017 includes something like \$70 million, I believe. The lion's share of that investment has gone to the Great Lakes, and rightly so. When it comes to fresh water, that's a major concern for Canada. Then Lake Winnipeg has received, I think, \$25.7 million from that fund.

Three other watersheds are noted in the fresh water action plan—the Fraser, the MacKenzie and the St. John's—yet those watersheds haven't received funds through the fresh water action plan budget amount that was committed in 2017.

Obviously, in British Columbia, the Fraser is top of mind as a concern for a lot of folks. There's a tremendous amount of opportunity there. Like I mentioned at the beginning, part of that opportunity is the fact that there are so many organizations, first nations and communities that want to do this work. They're raring to go. They just need a federal partner that's willing to support that work with a financial contribution.

To be fully transparent, Mr. Chair, I represent Skeena—Bulkley Valley. It's a riding that is named for the Skeena watershed, which is B.C.'s second-largest watershed and one of our most important wild salmon systems. I grew up in the Fraser watershed, right at the headwaters of the Fraser River.

The work that's proposed as a part of this.... Of course the B.C. watershed security fund would disburse funds to all of the watersheds in B.C. I think it's really, truly a provincial effort. However, because it's such a huge watershed, the Fraser is a big opportunity. I know that right from the very top of the watershed to the estuary, there's a lot of work that can be done.

I think that's really why it's worth supporting a motion that focuses on British Columbia, because that's where a lot of this energy is. They're trying to create a new model around watershed governance that looks at watersheds differently.

We heard at our last meeting, I think it was, some testimony by one of the academic witnesses, who talked about the fact that watersheds often don't line up with political boundaries. Trying to

think more bio-regionally and trying to think about how we come together around the health of watersheds and work together across communities and across differences to do that work is the really exciting part of this and why it's really worth supporting.

We're on the original motion, so I can also go back to Mr. Mazier's comment about job creation. It's true that some of the most direct job creation would come directly from the government investment in this fund. As I mentioned previously, it would also come from the private sector contributions that are leveraged through that fund. More important is the fact that healthy watersheds support all kinds of economic activity and all kinds of jobs. When we invest in restoring watersheds and when we invest in watershed resilience, other economic benefits will accrue from that.

If we think about the impact of the flood this past summer on agriculture, there is restoration work that we can do. There is stewardship work that could be funded through this fund that would actually result in better resilience for farmers to withstand future droughts. Of course, the jobs that rely on that agricultural activity.... In my area, a lot of it is beef and raising cattle. We saw just absolutely devastating consequences from the level five drought this past summer.

● (1145)

Farmers are still trying to have hay shipped up from the United States, at incredible cost. There are a few ranchers and farmers who are thinking ahead about how they can do this work differently and how they can manage their land in a different way so that they're more resilient against the impact of floods by rotating the grazing of their cattle and working with wetlands on their property and this sort of thing. I know this is a topic that Mr. Mazier is very passionate about, so that's why I mention it.

A voice: You're going to trigger him.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I know. I'm trying to goad you into more debate here.

The point is that, of course, it's more difficult to measure, but when we make an investment in the resilience of ecosystems and watersheds, there is all sorts of economic activity that will come from that. In the lower Fraser we're talking about salmon habitat and about white sturgeon. There's a massive tourist economy that is based on that. I could go on and on at length in terms of the job creation potential here.

I'm noting the time, Mr. Chair. Maybe we can bring this to a vote. I'm really encouraged by the debate I've heard so far. The work happening in my home province makes me incredibly proud that our provincial government is taking this on.

Like I said at the outset—and I'll end with this—the biggest potential here is to work on the ground, to have boots on the ground to work on issues that matter to communities and to first nations, and to use that as a catalyst for reconciliation and for building relationships that I think we'll see a lot of benefit from in the future.

• (1150)

I think that's the real potential here. We have first nations. We have groups like the B.C. Wildlife Federation, Watershed Watch, the POLIS Project, the B.C. government and local governments. Everyone's coming together—partly in the wake of these devastating events that we've seen—around this idea of restoring and investing in watersheds. I think it would be a real shame if the federal government didn't get behind that and help to amplify that work.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair. I'm really hopeful this motion will pass.

The Chair: Before I go to Mr. van Koeverden and Ms. Chatel there are a couple of things.

One is that the notice said we'd meet until 1:30. However, we don't have to go until 1:30. If we're not ready for the witnesses at noon we have to extend the time unless somebody wants to propose an adjournment. That's one point.

The second point is that it was brought to my attention that we may need to modify one word in the motion as a result of the amendment to strike “that the Committee report this to the House”. Because we've struck that, it doesn't make sense to put “that the government table a written response.” We could put “that the government provide a written response” because we're not reporting to the House.

Is it acceptable that we change the word “table” to “provide”?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: On that point, I think that's fine. Maybe put “provide to the committee” to be clear about—

The Chair: Okay, so it would be “provide to the committee a written response.”

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Yes, because they're not going to provide it to the House anymore.

The Chair: Is everyone okay with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: That way we can debate their response when it comes back.

The Chair: Yes, exactly.

[*Translation*]

I'll now give the floor to Mr. van Koeverden.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be very brief.

First, thanks again to my colleague for raising this. I think it's a great recommendation. It's a great motion.

On the topic of job creation with respect to conservation authorities in Ontario—with my being familiar with how it all works—really good conservation authorities aren't government jobs. They self-generate a lot of their own revenue, and they're able to pay their staff without having to rely on government funding. Then the government funding that does go into these organizations protects our local economy. It protects against insurance liability. It protects from flooding, and it protects a lot of things that people might not

notice, such as biodiversity and species loss. These are really important things too, which might not have the attention of absolutely everybody. I'm glad that my honourable colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley cares about these things.

I think one of the reasons it ought to be funded by multiple levels of governments is that, occasionally, you get a government that's hostile—

The Chair: Do you have a point of order, Mr. Mazier?

Mr. Dan Mazier: I have a point of order. Is the minister coming today?

The Chair: I wanted to discuss that as well. He's not coming today.

Mr. Dan Mazier: It's been over 250 days, so I wondered when he was coming.

The Chair: He's not coming today. I believe he's in Dubai today for COP.

Mr. van Koeverden, to all the committee, we're pretty much in line to start the witnesses at 11 o'clock, but it's obviously up to the committee how much time we want to take debating this.

Go ahead, Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: All I was trying to say is that great conservation authorities provide an excellent framework or model for exactly what we're talking about here. Good ones do a lot for a community, and they're not government jobs. The reason to have them funded by multiple levels of government is that the work is so important and it creates stability. Occasionally you'll get a government that's hostile towards them, so making sure there are multiple levels of funding for them.... For example, in 2021, a conservation authority was given \$9 million from ECCC through the nature smart climate solutions fund.

I'm very supportive of my friend's motion, and I'm looking forward to voting for it.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mrs. Chatel, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to emphasize that all levels of government, whether federal or provincial, have to deal with the water issue. It's fundamental. In the Outaouais, where I live, there are more than 400,000 citizens in the Ottawa River watershed, one of which is located in Quebec and the other in Ontario. Personally, I cannot conceive of watersheds having political boundaries, as my colleague so aptly said. I have to emphasize that the federal government has to get involved, along with the provinces, as well as the municipalities and watershed organizations.

I've talked to the watershed organizations in my riding, and they need support from the federal government. I'm really disappointed that my colleague voted against the amendment. Had it been passed, it would have allowed us to have discussions about increasing funding for the Outaouais watersheds. They need it.

That said, I would like us to vote on the motion, which I will be supporting.

The Chair: We will now go to the vote.

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

[English]

The Chair: I have Mr. Leslie on the list here. I do have one very small item of future business that I would like to deal with. It has to do with the minister's appearance. If we can get this over with very quickly, we can go to Mr. Leslie.

The minister said he could come on December 14. On the 14th, the first hour is with Imperial Oil. Do you want to receive the minister for the second hour?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Did you want him here with his officials.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That was really easy. That's great.

Mr. Dan Mazier: The meeting will be a total of three hours.

The Chair: Okay. This is a proposal that we meet for three hours. We're asking that we meet with the minister and officials for two hours on top of the one hour with Imperial, which would make a three-hour meeting.

Are we in agreement with this?

No, we don't have UC. I think we'll come back to this later. I thought we could deal with it quickly and move on

We'll go to Mr. Leslie.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do hope we can get the minister after such a long time. In my time here in this chamber, I still haven't had the opportunity to question him and I look forward to that.

I appreciate the opportunity today to raise one of the motions we have had on notice. I had the full intention of doing so during committee business prior to our spending an hour to find out, as we knew and indicated early on, how the vote was going to go on what is a laudable motion regarding boots on the ground. I will note that one of the first actions this Liberal government undertook was to cancel the recreational fisheries partnership program, which worked on ecosystem and habitat restoration with this exact sort of mentality of boots on the ground.

I hope folks are watching as we spend an hour on grammatical amendments to a motion that ultimately, with the removal of "report this to the House", amounts to nothing. It amounts to our urging the department to do something and their sending a letter back to the ether. We know that's not how policy is made. We should recognize that the government will set its own priorities and, in this

case, our urging to set a monetary amount aside simply is not how I expect the government to move forward.

However, with that, Mr. Chair, I'd like to move the motion that I have on notice. I move:

Given that:

- (a) the Senate is expected to vote on Bill C-234 to remove the carbon tax from grain drying and barn heating;
- (b) Canadian farmers have called upon the Senate to pass this important legislation;
- (c) Bill C-234 would save farmers one billion dollars, and help lower food prices for Canadians;

the committee call upon senators who are delaying the passage of the legislation to stop playing political games with the livelihoods of Canadian farmers, recognize the decision of the elected House of Commons, and pass Bill C-234 into law without further delay.

Mr. Chair, the reason I wanted to do this during committee business, as requested by our colleagues to not disrupt witness testimony, is again the timeliness of this motion as it relates to an upcoming vote in the Senate. We are all, of course, aware that the governing Liberals, bizarrely with the help of the Bloc Québécois, decided to defeat a motion that was before the House of Commons that would urge the Senate to follow the will of the elected chamber. However, it seems the desire to radically increase taxes is stronger out of the Bloc Québécois of late.

This is now before the Senate once again. Following that vote last week, there was yet another amendment to Bill C-234 put forward at the Senate at third reading. While you might think it is a new amendment meant to aid the bill in some way and to try to improve the legislation, the reality is that it is an amendment that wasn't just voted down at committee; it was voted down by the entirety of the chamber already. This is not about trying to improve the legislation. This is about Liberal-appointed senators trying to delay and, from their perspective, hopefully kill Bill C-234 because of the money it's going to leave in the pockets of our hard-working Canadian farmers and the fact that it's going to cause political headaches.

I don't understand Senate procedural aspects. I have no idea how the retabling of an amendment that was already voted down in the House of Commons is permissible; however, I will leave that to the senators to decide.

Farmers have been clear, as evidenced by the thousands of phone calls, emails and letters they have been sending to senators over the past number of weeks.

• (1200)

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: May I ask a point of clarification?

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame Chatel.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I apologize for interrupting my colleague, but I didn't receive the motion.

The Chair: Our colleague tabled this notice of motion some time ago.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: So this is not a new motion.

The Chair: It was November 17.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Okay, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Leslie.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying—

Mr. Dan Mazier: What is the speaking order, Chair?

The Chair: I have you, Mr. Mazier, and then Mr. Deltell and Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Could you clarify that hands were up before this motion was tabled?

The Chair: Yes, they were up—not before the motion, but they were up.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Is the convention now that if your hands were up from the previous—

The Chair: I am told there is no convention. It's my decision. That's what I am told by the clerk.

You can challenge that if you want to.

Go ahead, Mr. Leslie.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying, farmers have been very clear in their support for Bill C-234 and their opposition—

The Chair: I apologize. It's not from the 17th. It's from the 24th.

You've put in a new one since the.... It's from the 24th. You should have it.

Go ahead.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I was stating, the reason for a new one is due to the fact that we are once again awaiting a vote tonight at around 5:30. It's a vote from the Senate on an identical motion to one that was already voted down by that exact same Senate just a couple of weeks ago. If this could be described as anything other than a Liberal delay tactic, I would be all ears. There is no explaining away why, once the Senate has already decided that this amendment is not what should be happening and that the bill should be moved forward unamended....

To see this happening is so frustrating to Canadian farmers. That's why they have sent thousands of pieces of correspondence to senators—these unelected, unaccountable senators—who are unwilling to do the right thing and pass the will of the House.

Now, I believe it would be very impactful if this committee—the environment committee of the House of Commons—would call upon the senators to follow that will. Follow the will of our elected members and defend that collective decision that we have made. We could pass this before Christmas, if the senators stop playing games over there.

The corn that is still standing that has yet to be dried will need to be dropped to 15 points. We can provide a reprieve to those farmers and start our very best.... We can go home to our ridings with our heads held high knowing that we are doing our very best to help lower food prices for Canadians.

I urge all of my colleagues to do the right thing. Pass this motion, so we can get to witness testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1205)

The Chair: Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Instead of working to remove a carbon tax for Canadian farmers, Minister Guilbeault has jetted off to Dubai. The Liberals don't understand that taxing the farmer who grows the food is taxing those who buy the food.

What kind of government punishes farmers for growing food?

It's become very clear that Minister Guilbeault has no shame in punishing Canadian farmers. In fact, he refuses to—

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I'm just wondering what talking about the minister has to do with the motion that was just brought forward.

The Chair: It doesn't, directly.

Go ahead, Mr. Mazier. Focus on the motion, please.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Yes, it's on the carbon tax and Bill C-234.

It's become very clear that Minister Guilbeault has no shame in punishing Canadian farmers. In fact, he refuses to show up at this committee to defend his failed policies. It's been over 250 days since the minister showed up at the environment committee to answer questions. He continues to hide from Canadians because he knows that his policies are an utter disaster.

The solution is to help Canadian farmers. It's called Bill C-234. Bill C-234 will create a carbon tax carve-out for Canadian farmers. We should be working to pass this bill so Canadian farmers can feed the people.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Deltell.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think that, as members of Parliament, we are all aware of the fact that the food banks in our ridings are currently overwhelmed. But when we talk about food, we're also talking about agriculture. That's why our party introduced Bill C-234, which proposes to give our farmers a break on the carbon tax. We were very pleased to see that the elected representatives of Canadians, that is to say the members of the House of Commons, voted overwhelmingly in favour of Bill C-234. We were very happy to see that the NDP was with us, and even happier to see that the Bloc Québécois was too.

The bill is currently being studied by the Senate, as provided for in our constitution and political system. However, we're finding that some senators are talking a lot and extending the time for debate on this issue. And yet, as we speak, food banks are overflowing with requests and lacking in donations. We have to understand that we need our agriculture if we're going to feed people, and that people need to be fed, especially in the current situation where, as we know, everyone is struggling with the cost of inflation.

Last week, we asked, through a motion and a debate in the House of Commons, that the Senate pass this bill quickly so that we could move forward. Unfortunately, like you, we saw that the members of the Bloc Québécois decided to vote against this request. That's their choice and it's up to them, but it's still curious that Bloc Québécois members agreed on Bill C-234, but that they also agreed that senators are taking all the time necessary and stretching the time for debate in order not to pass this bill. We can't, on the one hand, democratically accept a bill and, on the other, let senators take all the time they need to delay the passage of a bill duly passed by the elected representatives of the people. That's why this motion seeks to get to the bottom of Bill C-234.

I would also like to remind you that we were expecting the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to appear before the committee two weeks ago. Unfortunately, during the week he was scheduled to appear before our committee, he preferred to take part in almost every oral question period in the House. He even spent an hour in the Senate to answer questions from senators. It's an excellent idea to answer questions from senators, except that he should have first appeared before the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to answer our questions, as we had requested. It seems that he didn't have time to appear before our committee, but that he had time to attend all oral question periods, make an announcement and hold a press conference, and even go to the Senate. That's a shame.

• (1210)

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I don't know where to start. There have been quite a lot of thoughts shared with respect to this motion.

First, I want to ensure that it's on the record that it is our view that the Senate is independent. They have a democratic right and a professional obligation to ensure that all legislation passed by the House of Commons gets a sober second look and full consideration.

My colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills, the Honourable Michael Chong, who is a good friend of mine, has said that this is a tax bill and ought not to have been considered by the Senate in this regard, but the Supreme Court did actually indicate that carbon pricing does not qualify as a tax, so unfortunately, he's wrong.

Not only is he wrong, but the insistence that the Senate do our bidding is also wrong. My colleague said that he's unfamiliar with the way that the Senate does their business. That's fine. It's not up to us. We don't need to become familiar with how the Senate does their business. It is their business and not ours. On this side, and on

every other side in the House, we're not going to be telling the Senate how to do their work.

By the way, the only senators who sit in a political caucus are the Conservative ones, and they still do. We don't have senators at Wednesday morning caucus. You do. The Conservatives do, so you ought to have a conversation with those senators. We don't have senators sitting in our caucus, but the Conservatives do.

On the Conservatives, I need to remind them that they ran on a carbon tax scheme with Erin O'Toole in the last federal election in 2021 that would have imposed the same price on pollution that we have now. If they're so against it after two years, hypothetically, if they had won the last federal election, would they have had the same revelation two years after that? They committed to a carbon price similar to ours that would have been imposed on farmers in the same way that ours was, to slowly nudge along innovations with respect to things like grain drying.

Irrespective of the fact that the vast majority, 97%, of farm fuels are exempt from carbon pricing, there remain a few as per Bill C-234 that are not exempt from carbon pricing, and they include some of the fuels used for grain drying. However, our governments also invested almost \$1 billion in farmers to make grain drying more efficient and reduce its emissions.

I like baking sourdough—

Mr. Branden Leslie: A billion dollars...?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I have the numbers for you. It's \$500 million in R and D, and \$493.4 million implemented. I'll provide you with those numbers, MP Leslie, and there's more. I have a list.

I suppose the Conservatives don't listen to my answers in the House of Commons.

The Chair: Speak through the chair, please.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: With all that, my last point is on misinformation. Four or five times this afternoon, the Conservatives have suggested that the minister has refused to come. The minister was only recently invited.

As soon as the minister was invited, we responded with a date of availability. The calendar up until his departure to COP was full, and he will be here when he returns from COP, which is an important international environmental conference attended by leaders of various governments from various political stripes. I'll leave it there. I hope we can vote.

The Chair: Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

This is ground that we've harrowed several times now. One assertion that the Conservatives are making here—I won't belabour the point—is that the Senate should pass legislation that has been duly passed by the House of Commons. That is an assertion that I wholly support. Our party, as many folks will know, doesn't support the notion of having an unelected Senate at all.

Perhaps I can pose this through you, Mr. Chair, to my Conservative friends. I would just hope, for the sake of consistency, if in the future when other legislation is duly passed by the House of Commons on any topic, they would also vote for similar motions that call on the Senate to swiftly pass the legislation that we, as the House of Commons, passed.

If we look at the history of the place, that hasn't been a consistently applied philosophy. If it's good for one bill, it's good for another bill. Maybe where we find common ground is the idea that the Senate should swiftly pass legislation that goes through the people's House and is carried by a democratic vote by democratically elected representatives.

I think that's something that all of us around the table would come around to, yet we see that, instead, there is this game-playing that happens. When there are bills that some parties don't like, they try to tie them up or kill them in the Senate, and when there are bills that they do like, they impress upon the Senate the urgency of passing them as quickly as possible.

If I were a member of the public watching these deliberations, I would note the lack of consistency—I'll just call it a lack of consistency to be kind. I would love to see all of the bills that we pass in the House make their way swiftly through the Senate. There are some great senators who I quite enjoy and who I think do excellent work and have extremely illustrious backgrounds. That doesn't take away from the fact that they weren't elected by the people to be there.

If we're going to entertain motions like this.... Really, this has nothing to do with the merit of the actual bill. It just has to do with the assertion that we've heard again and again that the Senate should pass legislation that the House of Commons has passed.

I'll just note that, and I would hope that we could move on to witness testimony, because I know we're all dying to talk about fresh water today.

• (1215)

The Chair: There's no one else on the list. Can we move to a vote on Mr. Leslie's motion?

(Motion negatived: 6 nays; 4 yeas)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now take a break to welcome the witnesses, who were kind enough to join us a second time so that we can finish our discussion with them.

[*English*]

Mr. Branden Leslie: Chair, I understand we are going to be starting witness testimony for one hour here very shortly.

The Chair: The testimony's been given. It's the Q and A basically.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Sure.

I do have one other motion on notice that I would like to table and speak to very quickly. Hopefully, we can get a vote and get a full hour of witness testimony in, if that is acceptable.

It reads:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the Committee order the production of documents related to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change's trip to COP28 in Dubai:

(a) detailed itinerary;

(b) meeting details, including the (i) name and titles of the individuals in attendance, (ii) meeting notes, (iii) purpose of meeting, and (iv) outcome of meetings and;

(c) briefing notes;

(d) and expenses incurred by the Minister;

And that these documents be provided no later than December 14th, 2023.

This, of course, marries perfectly with the minister and our hopes that he will be appearing, that the House will not be rising and that we'll have the opportunity, after 250 days, to finally have the minister before this committee.

Again, I believe this motion is extremely timely. Given that the minister is in Dubai currently, making a number of major policy announcements that impact this country.... There are tens of thousands of participants. I think it's very important to know who the minister is meeting with there, what his agenda looks like, who he is trying to influence on the international stage as we work collaboratively to tackle the challenges of climate change, and who he is trying to be influenced by.

Given that they are living, for two weeks, under an air-conditioned dome of hypocrisy in the desert, I imagine it is quite expensive and high-emitting. We might not be able to get to the entirety of the cost of the COP summit itself, but in terms of the spending that the minister is undertaking alongside his, I'm sure, large entourage funded by taxpayers, I think it's important that.... While there is a significant cost to taxpayers, we deserve to know what the value for that money being spent is. We can really only tell what is happening there during this very long summit if we are able to provide this information and the totality of the price we are paying.

I know the government originally campaigned on being open by default, so I hope we can garner support from all members across this committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Mazier, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to my colleague for introducing this motion.

The environment minister has jetted off to Dubai, leaving Canadians behind in the cold. This hypocrisy is astounding. Minister Guilbeault has no shame in punishing hard-working Canadians with a costly carbon tax. He has no shame with increasing the cost of gas for the mother who drives her kids to hockey practice.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Hold on a second, Mr. Mazier.

Mrs. Chatel, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Are we talking about the motion that was just introduced, or are we talking about the minister's involvement in—

The Chair: We're talking about the motion that was introduced.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: The motion is from December 1. It's asking for documents.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Okay.

The Chair: The motion asks for information related to the minister's trip.

You may continue, Mr. Mazier.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you.

I'll start over again.

The environment minister has jetted off to Dubai, leaving Canadians out in the cold. The hypocrisy is astounding. Minister Guilbeault has no shame in punishing hard-working Canadians with a costly carbon tax. He has no shame with increasing the cost of gas for the mother who drives her kids to hockey practice. He has no shame with increasing the cost of groceries or taxing the farmer who grows the food.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: A point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Mazier, I have to interrupt you because we have a point of order.

Go ahead, Mrs. Chatel.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: I don't see how my colleague's comments have anything to do with the December 1 motion, which I have before me. It doesn't talk about hockey or anything like that.

Can we proceed with debate on the motion, please?

The Chair: It's true that it's not really relevant to the motion. From a technical point of view, the motion asks that the minister or his department make public certain details after the trip, which is still ongoing.

I would ask Mr. Mazier to stick to the motion and perhaps talk about the relevance of the information being requested from the minister.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: The relevance is what the impact of the carbon tax is costing.

I'm getting to the point here. It will be really brief.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: The motion doesn't deal with carbon pricing, but with travel expenses. Those are two different topics, I believe.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: We're talking about what is going on in Dubai, and what he's talking about.

I'll finish up here, Mr. Chair.

He has no shame in increasing the cost of home heating for a senior trying to stay warm this winter, but when it comes to him, he has no shame about jetting around the world, releasing more emissions in two weeks than most Canadians will in a year. Canadians deserve to know the details of Minister Guilbeault's trip to Dubai, including how much it's going to cost.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I'll withdraw. I think we should vote on this motion.

[*Translation*]

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

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

First of all, Mr. Leslie's motion should simply be an order paper question, and if ever Mr. Leslie were not satisfied with the answer he received, he could bring this up again by introducing his motion.

Furthermore, I remember that a few weeks ago, we voted on a motion similar to his. It wasn't about COP28, but it was about questions to be put to the minister. At that time, we voted to permit everyone to ask the minister any questions they deemed relevant when he appeared before the committee. I stand by my position on that. When the minister appears before the committee, if the Conservatives want to ask him a question about COP28, they can do so. The Liberals can ask him questions on other topics, as can I or Mr. Bachrach.

So I would urge Mr. Leslie to put a question on the order paper to get those answers.

• (1225)

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I came into this debate with an open mind. I think it is worthwhile to know who the minister is meeting with at COP. That's important disclosure, given the significance of the deliberations that are happening there. However, listening to the Conservatives' debate, it seems that their intention here is to somehow criticize the government for travelling to an international meeting to discuss a globally existential threat.

Given the fact that the climate crisis is a collective action problem that affects every single country around the world, we can't solve it without talking to each other.

I would bring us back to the debate about a hybrid Parliament and the indignation with which the Conservatives argued that the only way we can have Parliament function is if we are there in person. It's an assertion that I actually agree with, as someone who would benefit greatly from being at home more, seeing my kids and sleeping in my bed more than two nights a month.

The point of going to COP—at great expense, granted—is so that leaders can sit down with each other, look each other in the eye and talk seriously about how they're going to solve this problem.

The rhetoric around jet-setting around the world and sitting in air-conditioned rooms frankly diminishes the seriousness of the debate. I'm all for people having different opinions and different perspectives, but I think Canadians deserve for us to be serious on this issue. This is an issue that affects every single one of us. It affects our kids. It affects our grandkids. It affects our economy. It affects our country, yet to just talk about “how dare someone sit in an air-conditioned room” reduces us to the level of grade school nattering. This is not a serious conversation.

We're sitting in an air-conditioned room right now. In fact, most of the rooms we sit in on Parliament Hill are air-conditioned. Those of us who live more than a couple of hours' drive away fly to Ottawa to engage in Parliament—and yes, that releases emissions. It's one of the realities that we have to grapple with, because the status quo.... We can live in a system and work to change the system at the same time. The idea that we somehow are hypocrites because we exist in modern society is, frankly, ridiculous.

I have huge challenges with the way the COP conference has evolved, with the fact that it's crawling with oil and gas lobbyists, the fact that it's ballooned to 50,000 delegates and the fact that it's being chaired by an oil baron, who's using it as a venue to make oil and gas deals. All of these things are patently absurd, and I think deserve scrutiny and criticism, but it is vitally important that global leaders, elected officials and civil society come together on a regular basis to talk about how we're going to fix this problem.

Underlying the Conservatives' critique of this—underneath it all—is the fact that they don't believe that we should be having a serious conversation about the climate. They want to undermine the very conversation about this existential threat, because they don't take it seriously. I think that's really what we're seeing behind all of these interventions, all of these motions—a lack of seriousness on the issue of our time.

I won't vote to support this motion, as much as I want to know who Minister Guilbeault is meeting with at COP. Listening to the debate...it's not a serious debate. It's not about transparency. It's not

about getting to the bottom of how many oil and gas lobbyists the minister's meeting with or how many environmental groups or what the substance of those conversations is. It's an attempt to discredit the entire global effort to get at how we're going to tackle this collective action challenge that we face.

I would note that, if you look at the delegations coming from Canada to COP, you see it includes lots of folks who have a pretty different perspective than I do on the climate challenge and the climate crisis.

● (1230)

I'll leave it at that. I spoke about 10 times longer than I intended to, Mr. Chair, but obviously I have some strong feelings about the disingenuousness with which this motion has been brought forward.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. van Koeverden, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I could not have said it better. My colleague expressed exactly what I was thinking over here.

The premise of the motion is fine. Accountability and transparency are good, but when Mr. Mazier went on a tirade about the legitimacy of flying to a meeting, when we all flew here, I'm pretty sure, except for maybe Madame Chatel.... Ms. Taylor Roy drove. I drive sometimes too, and I'm lucky. Gérard Deltell has an electric vehicle, I might add, because he's an environmentalist in his own right. We're not counting carbon credits over here, but my point is that in order to have an impact....

Canada is responsible for 1.5% of global emissions. That's something that the Conservatives love to remind folks, “We're just a small player in the emissions world.” That might be true. I would also add that we're 0.5% of the global population, so it means that, on average, each of us sitting here has triple the carbon footprint of an average global citizen. That's significant.

Why do we show up to these meetings? It's leadership—because we can have an impact if we're in the room. Yesterday, instead of being here, as the member so eloquently put it, the minister announced that Canada was the first-ever country to commit to reducing our oil and gas emissions, with respect to methane, by 75%. That's a global first. Canada stood up. We took credit. We were given a lot of credit, and a lot of organizations out there in the environmental non-governmental organization space are saying Canada's on the right path.

Other countries are going to follow suit. If the United States does the same thing, as it has indicated it might, that's massive. Do you know why? It's because the United States is responsible for 30% or 40% of global emissions and a lot of methane. Methane's 80 times worse than CO₂ when it's put into our environment. Thankfully, it doesn't last as long, but it's really bad for global warming. It has a negative impact on our environment.

Why do we show up to important meetings? We do it to be leaders. We already know that the Conservatives do not want to lead on climate change, despite having run their last election on a promise to price carbon. After that election, they lost, and members of their caucus flew on airplanes over to Europe to meet with the Danube Institute—which is a far-right group, a bunch of climate deniers—to eat chateaubriand and oysters and porterhouse steaks paid for by climate change deniers in the Danube Institute, in a far-right context.

Mr. Chair, we all have a carbon footprint and we all have an obligation to lower it. By showing up, Canada was the first country in the world to set this ambitious target to lower our methane oil and gas sector emissions below 2012 levels by 75% by 2030. That is significant progress.

I'm willing to stake a chateaubriand dinner, if you like—maybe on Sparks Street—on the fact that he's not done yet. He's over there to continue to lead, and I for one am really proud that we have an environmental activist as an environment minister. When I was a kid, I grew up watching David Suzuki on TV. I grew up reading Owl Magazine and I grew up wanting to be an environmental champion.

On this side of the House, we can confidently say that we are. The Bloc can say that, so can the NDP and so can our Green members. The Conservatives cannot.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Yes, we can, but the point is, Mr. Chair, that it's very easy to set big, ambitious targets when you never reach them. This is exactly the track record of this government. They have never gained, never attacked....

[Translation]

The Liberals never got to where they should be. We are the only G7 country whose emissions have gone up rather than down. That is the track record after eight years of Liberal governance.

Need I remind you that, last year, the UN concluded that, after eight years of Liberal governance, Canada ranked 58th out of 63 countries in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions? The only times that the targets were met, or rather that we experienced a reduction, was during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am sorry, but if anyone wants to shut down the economy once again, we will not be on board. That said, everyone has their own approach.

The Liberals spent eight years using rhetoric and lecturing others around the world, but nothing came of it. That is the Liberal track record.

Yesterday, the minister made an ambitious announcement saying that the government had a very high target and that, in that respect, Canada was a world leader. That's all well and good, but it may be more credible if it were a world leader in results, not in announcements. Again, everyone has their game plan.

Concerning methane, I want to say that last week I met with a group of people who are working on that source of pollution. I assume that I am not the only one, by the way, since they were in a meeting. This is extremely interesting, especially since the federal government studied their proposals and came to positive conclusions. It's the same with the provincial government—

• (1235)

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I have a point of order.

Are our witnesses waiting online, or are they in person?

The Chair: They are not online yet.

There are some online and some not.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I simply want to remind you that you can make big, ambitious announcements, but you still have to have a track record that speaks for itself, which is not the case.

With respect to methane, as I was saying, the provincial and federal governments have given the green light on this. There are still the major emitters, and they have to do their part. That is our wish.

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

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Actually, Mr. Longfield brought up what I wanted to say. Some witnesses are online; others are waiting. We were supposed to welcome them at noon. Can we show them a little respect and not delay their testimony again? Can I request a vote?

The Chair: We're at the end of the speaking list, so we can proceed to a vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: We're going to take a short break to allow the witnesses who are not already online to join us.

• (1235)

(Pause)

• (1240)

The Chair: We will now resume the meeting.

For your information, the sound quality tests have been carried out successfully.

I would like to begin by thanking the witnesses for making themselves available a second time to enable us to finish the discussions we started last week.

I remind you that Professor Diane Orihel is back with us in person, while we have Professor Beatrix Beisner, Wanda McFadyen and Marc Hudon online.

We'll start with Mr. Kram. I am going to change the speaking times so that we can take advantage of the witnesses' presence. We're going to go to five-minute rounds, which would normally be six minutes. The Bloc Québécois and NDP members will have three minutes instead of two and a half.

I give you the floor, Mr. Kram.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for rejoining us here today.

I would like to begin with Ms. Beisner and Ms. McFadyen.

In the previous meeting, both of you had statements to the effect that watershed boundaries do not necessarily match jurisdictional boundaries. As the Canada water agency is in the process of setting up its head office and its regional offices across the country, would it make more sense for the regional offices to match up with jurisdictional boundaries, or would it make more sense to have them match with watershed boundaries?

Ms. Beatrix Beisner (Professor and Researcher, Université du Québec à Montréal, As an Individual): Since you said my name first, I'll go first.

I'm not an expert on the political aspects of these things, but my feeling would be that there is some sense in having it correspond somewhat to jurisdictional boundaries, because that's where the money and the decision-making comes from. However, on the other hand, of course, I do think that these units have to work together.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

I'm sorry, I was supposed to speak in French, but I completely forgot.

In my opinion, you are right to think that this issue should be addressed from a jurisdictional point of view—that is to say from a political point of view, but we also have to consider natural borders.

That said, I think Ms. McFadyen has more experience in this area than I do.

[*English*]

The Chair: Would you like someone else to answer?

Ms. McFadyen.

Ms. Wanda McFadyen (Executive Director, Assiniboine River Basin Initiative): Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the committee member for the question.

With regard to office location, you have existing buildings and staff in place, so given our virtual world and our ability, they can work transboundary in the existing watersheds that are there, being cognizant of those particular watersheds. For example, the Winnipeg office is located, of course, in Winnipeg within the Lake

Winnipeg basin, which covers a large chunk of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and northwestern Ontario. I think there should be recognition that they are working within those areas, but whether the agency is developed to work within those larger watersheds like Lake Winnipeg, the Mackenzie, the Nelson, etc., that needs to be looked at.

There also needs to be recognition that some of those water bodies here on the Prairies in the area where I work... The International Souris River Board and the International Red River Watershed Board exist because those watersheds also extend into the U.S. The International Joint Commission, in place along the Canada-U.S. border, works on those water bodies, such as the Great Lakes or the Souris River. It's important that it also liaise with those organizations.

Be cognizant of watersheds because they all merge together. Lake Winnipeg is comprised of four major watersheds. That is going to be important, moving forward, for a successful agency.

Mr. Michael Kram: Thank you, Ms. McFadyen.

The Chair: Mr. Hudon has his hand up, if you want.

Mr. Michael Kram: If he would like to chime in, then I certainly won't object.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Hudon (Member, Forum for Leadership on Water): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to make a comment.

I agree with what has been said about watershed management or administrative and political boundaries, if I may put it that way. However, in terms of the social involvement of the communities that live within these watersheds, it is important that the Canadians who will be part of these new geographic boundaries feel empowered or that they are directly involved. If administrative boundaries are too broad or too large, Canadians may lose interest over the years and no longer want to be as directly and consistently involved in the implementation of this new operation.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Kram: Maybe I will follow up with Mr. Hudon on that one.

At an earlier meeting, we heard from Daniel Wolfish of the Canada water agency, and he explained that, in addition to the head office in Winnipeg, there would be regional offices in Vancouver, B.C.; Burlington, Ontario; Toronto, Ontario; Gatineau, Quebec; Quebec City; and Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

Mr. Hudon, do you see any watersheds in the country that are not represented in the list of regional offices that I just mentioned?

That is for the other witnesses too.

Mr. Marc Hudon: Just quickly, does it cover the Arctic region?

Mr. Michael Kram: No, it doesn't look like there are any in the Arctic region.

Mr. Marc Hudon: Other than that, that's the only one that comes to mind quickly.

Mr. Michael Kram: I'll go quickly to the other two witnesses.

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: Can you just repeat the list again?

Mr. Michael Kram: Yes. It was the head office in Winnipeg. Then we had regional offices in Vancouver, B.C.; Burlington, Ontario; Toronto, Ontario; Gatineau, Quebec; Quebec City; and Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

• (1250)

Ms. Wanda McFadyen: I would concur with Mr. Hudon, that we need to look at the Arctic region and those watersheds in the north. Certainly in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and in those watersheds in Alberta, we rely on those for hydroelectricity, as does northern Quebec and probably northern Ontario. I'm assuming Dartmouth would also look after Labrador and Newfoundland. It's important to recognize those.

Whether they can be worked out of the existing offices...but not to forget them and the communities and citizens who live within those. It's very important that they are engaged.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: I agree that we must not forget the far north, especially in the context of climate change. A lot of the water that's already on the territory is frozen. It's going to melt and it's going to create new ecosystems. We have to think from that perspective. The migration of species to the north is also an issue.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ali, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. Thank you to the witnesses for being here today again.

My question is for Ms. Beisner.

I understand that the Canada-Quebec Agreement on the St. Lawrence expires in March 2026, and that a new agreement will be renegotiated. Do you have any thoughts on some of the key concentrations that should be included in the update?

Can you tell us more about provincial government initiatives in Quebec to protect and restore fresh water and any particular areas where you see there being a need for more collaboration?

[Translation]

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: I think I partly answered that question last time. Again, I have to say that my expertise is less on the political side and more on the ecosystem and ecology side. Mr. Hudon can probably answer more easily than I can with regard to the involvement of citizen groups. Personally, I believe that this is essential in the management of the St. Lawrence. I can talk more about inland waters. In Quebec, for example, there are watershed organizations. That is one of the ways of managing waterways in Quebec. I find that very useful because it engages all stakeholders in the field, as Mr. Hudon mentioned earlier. It is essential to have the involvement of the people who live there.

One of the problems with watershed organizations is that they have not always had the funding to implement the plans they had developed with the water stakeholders in the regions. They have to be supported through funding. It's good to have all the good discussions and to make all kinds of plans, but if there is no funding to implement them, there isn't much point to that.

[English]

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Orihel.

Can you tell us about barriers to addressing some of the water issues you are finding in your research?

What ways do you think the federal government could help address those challenges? Are there any innovative solutions you have seen in other jurisdictions to address some of these challenges?

Dr. Diane Orihel (Associate Professor in Aquatic Ecotoxicology, Queen's University, As an Individual): Thanks very much for your questions.

You asked what the barriers are to my research or to the tailing ponds issue. Could you clarify whether it's a question about my research or a question about the tailing ponds?

Mr. Shafqat Ali: I'll repeat the question again.

Can you tell us about barriers to addressing some of the water issues you're finding in your research?

That is the first question.

Dr. Diane Orihel: Thanks for the clarification.

In my research group we study the effects of naphthenic acids on fish and frogs. Naphthenic acids are the chemicals in tailings ponds. They are the major source of toxicity. They're not the only source of toxicity but the major source of toxicity.

We know that naphthenic acids break down very slowly. They're very persistent. We know that the concentrations of naphthenic acids in tailings ponds today are lethal. Organisms die within minutes to hours and sometimes days.

At lower concentrations, when we expose developing fish and frogs to these naphthenic acids, they have sublethal effects on reproduction, growth and behaviour. We see abnormalities in fish such as cardiac malformations. We see brain malformations. When we expose tadpoles, we see amphibians with deformed limbs.

What are the barriers to dealing with this issue? There doesn't seem to be the will, the framework or the push to actually do anything about this toxic waste that's been accumulating on the landscape for 50 years, and continues to accumulate.

• (1255)

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Is there anything in the way of a solution that you've seen in other jurisdictions to address some of these challenges?

Dr. Diane Orihel: Yes, it's an excellent question.

We've been mining oil sands in Canada since the late 1960s. For 50 years now, engineers, scientists and academics have been working at developing treatment technologies and figuring out ways of improving the efficiency of extracting bitumen from ore. They've been figuring out better ways of increasing water reuse in the industry and ways to flocculate and dewater tailings.

There's also been a lot of work to figure out how to detoxify the industrial waste water that we refer to as oil sands process-affected water, or OSPW. These technologies can be chemical or biological in nature. Chemically, there are advanced oxidation technologies that have been developed to basically break down all of the organic compounds in tailings ponds. On the biological side, there are microbes and wetland techniques to be able to do similar things to degrade the compounds.

Personally, the technology that I've been most excited about and have worked on in my lab is a titanium dioxide microparticle. I was excited by this new technology for cleaning up tailings ponds because it can basically blast apart the naphthenic acids that I work on, which I know are toxic to aquatic organisms. It uses a passive photocatalyst. Basically, these beads sit on top of tailings ponds and use energy from the sun to catalyze this process.

In my lab, we have exposed fish to other tailings pond water, or tailings pond water that's been treated using this titanium dioxide photocatalyst. I should credit Dr. Frank Gu here. His lab developed this technology. I'm just the ecotoxicologist who's testing it.

The Chair: We just have to wrap up, but I really want to know what the conclusion is. It's like a thriller movie here.

Dr. Diane Orihel: I'm sure someone else will ask me about it.

The Chair: No, please finish. I want to—

Dr. Diane Orihel: Okay, if you'll allow me to.

What we find is that, once we treat oil sands process-affected water using this titanium dioxide photocatalyst, we can remove the acute lethality of the water. However, if you only partly break down those compounds you can actually create more toxic breakdown products, so you really have to break all of those compounds down to be able to basically have the same end points as we see in our control fish that are not exposed to oil sands process-affected water.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Are the documents forwarded? I don't know how to ask for that.

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're done here with the questions.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I just.... She was referring to that—

The Chair: Can we get it for you? What do you want?

Mr. Shafqat Ali: I just want to ask if she can send a written response on her recommendation for what the federal government should do to address....

The Chair: Yes, if you could send a written response, please, on your recommendation for how the government should deal with tailings ponds' processed water....

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Yes.

Mr. Dan Mazier: On that research, too, you were talking about conclusions and what to watch out for. Then you were referring to the toxins in tailings ponds. Where did you get that data?

If you could forward that....

The Chair: If you could send us some written comments, it would be very valuable for our work.

We'll go now to Madame Pauzé.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for being with us again, either in person or by videoconference.

Ms. Beisner, I read that there are categories of watersheds: the sub-watershed, the watershed, the river basin and the ocean basin.

Should one of them be prioritized?

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: That's a good question. I'm not sure we can establish with certainty, from a scientific point of view, what type of watershed is most important. However, I can tell you a bit about our research.

As I mentioned last time, we have launched a project, funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, a federal agency, to collect samples from 650 lakes across Canada. That data helped us start answering that question.

As part of that sampling project, we studied all aspects of the water that we could study. One of the things we examined was the effect of the environment and the quality of the habitat on the zooplankton, these small planktic animals, first on the scale of bioregions—that is, regions defined by the type of forest and climate. We were able to explain a certain proportion of the makeup of these organism communities. We were pretty sure of what we were going to find in each type of lake.

Then we expanded our study to the continental watershed scale, taking into consideration the ocean into which the waters of a watershed flow in a given region. There are five or six continental watersheds in Canada, one of which is very small flowing into the Gulf of Mexico—

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Could you wrap up quickly, please?

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: Okay.

I would just say that, at that scale, we were in a much better position to explain what was happening for those communities of organisms. So I think those large watersheds are very helpful in terms of forecasting.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you. I'm sorry to have rushed you, but I have only three minutes, and I would like to hear what you have to say on another subject.

Some water management experts believe that we need to have a very frank discussion on the resource usage conflicts. Ms. Orihel talked about it, in a way. We used to think of the resource strictly from an economic and infrastructure point of view, for example. Now we're talking about biodiversity and resource preservation.

Can you quickly give us your thoughts on usage conflicts?

Ms. Beatrix Beisner: Usage conflicts are enormous and also affect drinking water, for example. I'm thinking in particular of Lac Saint-Charles in Quebec City. There is a lot of fighting over the use of that water. That is why we need to bring together stakeholders from a watershed, which may affect a waterway of interest like this one, to talk about their expectations, especially in the context of the coming climate change.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hudon, I see your hand is up. Do you have a brief comment to add?

Mr. Marc Hudon: Yes, thank you. If I may, on the topic of usage conflicts, I would like to give the example of the St. Lawrence action plan in Quebec. Since its inception, this mechanism has helped mitigate water usage conflicts in the St. Lawrence River, as well as at the mouth of its tributaries, whether by users of the waterways or by the surrounding communities involved. Today, we have mechanisms that have been in place for more than 20 years, and that contribute to the sustainable development of this majestic body of water, the St. Lawrence River.

• (1305)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hudon, could you send us details on those mechanisms, as well as examples?

Mr. Marc Hudon: Certainly.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

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

Thank you to our witnesses for coming back. This is really interesting testimony.

Dr. Orihel, I was reading on your Wikipedia page that the magazine *Nature* dubbed you “Lady of the Lakes” after your work to save the Experimental Lakes Area. I remember studying limnology at the University of Victoria with a fellow named Rick Nordin. He told us about the importance of the Experimental Lakes Area. Of course, the funding for it was cut under the Harper government, so perhaps I'll start just by thanking you for that really important work.

Part of this study is dealing with the tailings ponds. You may be familiar with the testimony that we heard from a number of witnesses on that topic, including, most notably, the Alberta Energy Regulator. I think one of the pieces that's been missing is a sense of

the scale and scope of the issue in a national context. From your testimony today, it sounds like there are some promising treatments that could be employed for tailings.

Maybe you can just talk for the rest of the time and provide the committee with some context that we can include in the report. I'm keen to know how much tailings are out there on the land base, how the tailings ponds in the oil sands region rank in terms of environmental liabilities in this country, how much of the tailings are currently being treated and what the long-term plan is for this area. I've flown over the oil sands and it's absolutely astounding, the scale of what's involved.

I know there are a lot of environmental liabilities in this country, not just from mines but from other developments as well. Can you just provide the committee with a high-level sense of what we're dealing with here?

Dr. Diane Orihel: Absolutely. I'd be happy to.

I'll back up right to the beginning with.... Am I allowed to use a whiteboard to just draw a very quick picture?

The Chair: I don't see why not.

Dr. Diane Orihel: I'll just draw a picture like this. This is the cross-section of the Athabasca River. The oil sands sit like this. Near the Athabasca River the oil sands are shallow, so near the Athabasca River oil sands are mined with surface mining, big pits. Further away from the oil sands, where the deposit is deeper—200 metres or so—that's where the industry uses in situ techniques, where they basically go down and have to blast it out from here.

The tailings pond issue that we're talking about is only an issue in the surface mining area right beside the Athabasca River. That's the first thing to understand. Why are the tailings ponds there? Well, when they're mining they just have a bunch of rock and they want to get that bitumen out of the rock, so the industry figured out how to boil it, basically. They boil it up and they're able to take off that bitumen layer. They need a lot of water to boil up and extract out the bitumen, so that's why there's a need to extract water from the Athabasca River.

When they're boiling it all up, they're not only pulling up the bitumen; they're creating this tailings slurry. That tailings slurry has to go to a tailings pond and settle. That overlying water, once it settles, can be reused and it can go back into the processing. Actually, to the industry's credit, they've increased the rate at which they recycle the water over time, but the problem with this recycling, reusing the water over and over again, is that it becomes more and more contaminated every time it goes back. Even though it makes sense, from a policy perspective, to encourage the industry to recycle their water, what it has created is a big problem with these massive ponds on the landscape of highly toxic water.

This is highly toxic water. We're not talking about subtle effects. Animals that are in contact with this water, land on this water, die. These are not subtle effects.

These are just open systems. These tailings ponds are basically mines, mine pits. They're not a sealed unit. They leak. There are drainage ponds around that leak bitumen and pump—

• (1310)

The Chair: In the interest of fairness—

Dr. Diane Orihel: Yes.

The Chair: I have let the time go because it's very interesting, but I have to go now to Mr. Leslie.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we need more white boards around this committee. I strongly encourage that, actually.

I would like to start with Ms. McFadyen, given that the Assiniboine is quite literally in my backyard. Our family farm is almost due south of the Assiniboine River. The Hoop and Holler was cut in 2011. The first field it went onto was one of our fields, so I am acutely aware of the impacts of overland flooding and the potential lack of availability of water.

Obviously, it's critical for irrigation in our area for vegetables, for the value-added processing in my hometown of Portage la Prairie with Simplot, McCain and Roquette, and of course for drinking water to various nearby communities.

One of Manitoba's heroes, I would say, is Duff Roblin. The foresight he had for a relatively small amount of money back in the sixties to build the Portage diversion and a number of other physical water management tools has paid off a thousand times over in terms of protection of farmland, physical structures and entire communities.

I'm of the view that we're going to need a similar round of that as we have a continuation of ebbs and flows in water availability and as we look to seek economic prosperity across our rural areas.

Ms. McFadyen, having looked through the future demand expectations, how do you think we can go about managing the future demand requirements out of the Assiniboine, recognizing the challenges of that? What role does the federal government have to play? What would you recommend in the sense of cost-sharing models that the federal government could step up in order to support the major infrastructure projects that we need to manage our water in your region?

Ms. Wanda McFadyen: With respect to future demands, as you know, Mr. Leslie, the Assiniboine covers the Qu'Appelle and Souris sub-basins as well as the Assiniboine. Currently, there is the Prairie Provinces Water Board in place, which has federal members and provincial representatives that deal with apportionment and water quality.

When we speak to what's going on in the landscape right now in the Assiniboine, we are in essence moving into a dry cycle or a drought again. Talking to landowners and those who work at the grassroots level, the conversation goes back to small, off-mainstem reservoirs that can assist producers and local communities. Those cost money to build as well as to maintain.

We're not talking about large structures like the Shellmouth Dam that's in place in Manitoba on the Assiniboine, or the Grant Devine or Rafferty dams. We're talking of mainstem opportunities to allow producers and communities to take advantage of those spring

runoffs or those rains, to control flooding but also to have water in reserve at times of dry cycles.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you.

Have there been any major federal investments in the past eight years towards water management projects?

Second, just to get two questions in at once, what are your thoughts on the potential Treherne dam project that has been on the books for many years and seems to ebb and flow in terms of its availability? What impact did that have in terms of water retention for our economic needs for drinking water, particularly as we have potatoes shifting acres, so that we could better manage this water on the landscapes?

• (1315)

Ms. Wanda McFadyen: From a federal perspective, the Lake Winnipeg basin initiative developed and delivered projects out there, but focusing on water quality certainly would impact the Lake Winnipeg side of things.

The Government of Manitoba has set up a conservation trust for the local watershed associations to access for project-based work with landowners and communities. That's in place, but those are all very small projects.

The Treherne dam project is much larger. It impacts landowners as well. When you start talking about some of those projects, there is considerable investment, and it needs to also have.... If there's a willingness or a want from a federal perspective, it should also have some federal support in that regard.

Mr. Branden Leslie: For a project like that or any similar project across the country, would it be possible for the province and municipalities alone to move forward without federal support? If you had to put a percentage on what the federal government would need to come in with, what would you state that at?

Ms. Wanda McFadyen: Some of those larger projects have become cost-prohibitive to municipalities and the provincial government. It needs to be a tripartite agreement to move forward. It depends on the scope of the project and the size. I can't necessarily put dollars on it, but it should be a cost share with the province and the federal government.

Municipalities are strapped, as you know, and the tax base of Manitoba and Saskatchewan's rural areas is getting smaller and smaller as citizens move to larger centres, so you're already strapping that municipality from a tax point of view. It's imperative on these fronts that both the provincial and federal governments come forward.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you.

Quickly, on the international component, is there any concern, given that so many of our waterways flow through the United States as well, that the collaboration between the two countries may be at risk of breaking down and that we could see water being retained on the United States side and not flowing through?

In the big picture going forward, are there general concerns about the interjurisdictional boundaries that they cross?

Ms. Wanda McFadyen: There have been for some. I can't speak for eastern Canada. Here in the western part of the world, I know they're working on some....

The Columbia River has been a point of contention. We have not seen it yet in the International Souris River Board. The Souris River is unique in the sense that it starts in Saskatchewan, goes into North Dakota and comes back into Manitoba. It crosses that international boundary twice.

Under the guidance of the International Joint Commission, which is long-standing, they work on water apportionment based on natural flows, as well as water quality. Certainly, the Red River in Manitoba flows from North Dakota and Minnesota into Manitoba.

As we get into various situations, we are probably going to see concerns raised with regard to water flow across international boundaries. I think it's imperative that the new Canada water agency does not work in a silo but with other organizations, such as the International Joint Commission, which is responsible for those waters along the Canada-U.S. boundary, including the Great Lakes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for returning to have this discussion.

I'm going to start with Mr. Hudon.

I've sat on some committees. Prior to being elected federally, I sat on a few citizenship committees at the City of Guelph, where we were looking at our waste-water study, which eventually became a 50-year waste-water plan. We also looked at Guelph's water supply strategy. Water was part of our community energy initiative on how to reduce our water use per capita by 50% while we increased our population by 50%, because Guelph is fed by ground water. There is a limited capacity for water in Guelph.

Many people say that water is a governance issue. The Forum for Leadership on Water has provided us, as a municipality, with information to help with our governance in a municipal context, which then also has to connect to other levels of governance—provincial and national governance. We have the Ontario Water Works Association and Water Canada. It is a complex area.

Could you comment on water as a governance, and what we can do federally to try to help coordinate with agencies such as the one that you work with?

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Hudon: I'm not sure I understand the question. I have to say that I don't work with agencies per se.

In terms of governance, I was involved in the St. Lawrence action plan.

[*English*]

The St. Lawrence action plan was instrumental in making collaborative initiatives with the provincial government. I have seen this

kind of work done in the province of Ontario, also, through the RAPs, but I don't remember.... It's been quite a few years since.

However, the key issue, even at that level, is to have social acceptability and to feel that the population is being understood, is being taken into account and is supportive of whatever level of government is involved. Municipalities are extremely.... They are key. They are the closest ones to the people.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

Maybe I'll clarify with you where I was coming from. The Forum for Leadership on Water.... You're listed as a member of that forum. The forum has a very diverse membership.

Groups like FLOW are critical in our understanding of the water needs locally, including municipal water leads. From your involvement with the other agencies, can you tell us how the federal government can look to agencies like FLOW to help us with our water strategies?

Mr. Marc Hudon: I could reply in writing. Maybe that would be better.

However, it would be to use active organizations on the ground within each province that we know are the champions. In Quebec, you have Regroupement des organismes de bassins versants du Québec, and you have the ZIP committees. Ontario has many organizations. You have to use what is existing and what has proven, over the years, to be instrumental in adapting to whatever new challenges come up.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

Anything in writing to show us to not forget about the Forum for Leadership on Water as a key partner would be beneficial for both of us.

Now I'm going to go to Dr. Orihel.

The work that you've done on the Experimental Lakes Area.... That was a canoeing area of mine when I grew up in Winnipeg. When the funding was cut, it was something that I felt very personally about—the opportunity that we were going to lose for keeping data on the health of our lakes and our wetlands.

Could you comment on the importance of long-term funding in keeping long-term data around fresh water in Canada?

Dr. Diane Orihel: Absolutely. Thank you very much.

There are two facets to speak to. First, there is long-term monitoring of lakes over time in the same way to see how they are changing. Another facet is long-term experiments. At the Experimental Lakes Area in northwestern Ontario, we have been doing both for over 50 years.

In terms of funding, long-term funding is so essential because, for people like me who are academics, our funding cycles are on the scale of a couple of years. You can't do large-scale, long-term experiments on NSERC funding cycles. You can't do long-term ecological monitoring of lakes on NSERC funding cycles. This really needs to be done with dedicated funding and dedicated people who stay the same, and securely, through time.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: That brings us to the end of our meeting.

I would like to thank the witnesses once again for making themselves available to continue a conversation that has turned out to be extremely interesting and rich in detail. A lot of information has been brought forward that will help us prepare our report.

Ms. Orihel, thank you for being with us in person once again.

I would also like to thank the witnesses who have joined us by videoconference.

We've had a very interesting and enjoyable discussion with you. Thank you and have a good day.

• (1325)

[*English*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair, before you adjourn.

I was hoping to have a question before we adjourn, but since I won't, I would just like to raise again my motion from last week, the Alberta Energy Regulator motion. As it was discussed but not fully debated, I'd like to bring it back to the agenda first thing on Thursday.

I can read the motion, if you'd like, or I can just ask that it be on the agenda first thing on Thursday.

The Chair: I believe the agenda is set for Thursday, so you would have to move it at some point during the meeting. If you're moving it now, you'd still have to move it again, because we're at 1:30 and the resources are limiting our ability to continue meeting today. We're basically done in four minutes, so you would have to move it again on Thursday.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Okay.

The Chair: Thanks.

We'll adjourn now.

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