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# Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley





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Thursday, March 28, 2024

• (1005)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order.

Good morning. We're here to discuss the estimates.

Premier Higgs, the floor is yours for five minutes. Go ahead, sir.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs (Premier of New Brunswick, Government of New Brunswick):** Before we start and before you raise a point of order, I'm not here for a controversial debate. I would just like the opportunity to make a comment—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I have a point of order.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:**—about thinking bigger in Canada and how we can meet the climate change objectives. We can be a major player here in New Brunswick.

I'm not here to—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** We will provide time for that—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Premier Higgs.

What's your point of order?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Mr. Chair, I'm looking forward to the testimony of both premiers today and to getting an explanation from both of them on why they're both raising taxes and the cost of heating and energy on the residents by 12%.

**The Chair:** What's your point of order?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I'm really interested in hearing why they're raising the cost of living for their residents.

**The Chair:** What's your point of order, Mr. Kusmierczyk?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** My concern, Mr. Chair, is that we are right now meeting in contravention of Standing Order 108 and also in contravention of a motion this committee passed yesterday that prohibits you, Chair, from calling meetings and witnesses unilaterally without consultation and consent from committee.

I would ask the clerk to provide some comment and direction, because this is now the third meeting this week that we've had scheduled without any consultation with the committee and without any instruction from the committee. This is the third meeting we've held in a row during a constituency week. This is a sacred week that is focused on constituents.

I know that our Conservative colleagues couldn't give two hoots about our constituents, but we do, so—

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk, can you just stick to the point of order, please, and not an editorial?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Absolutely. I'm just about to wrap up.

Whenever we have—

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The interpretation has stopped because there seems to be some interference.

[English]

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Is the interpretation on?

**The Chair:** Interpretation is on. Mr. Savard-Tremblay is just pointing out that other people are talking.

Could you get to your point of order, please?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I'm just about to conclude right here, shortly, because I want to get to the premiers as well.

Meetings during constituency weeks are reserved for—

**The Chair:** That's not a point of order, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Get to the point of order or we will move back to Premier Higgs.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** My point, Mr. Chair, is I that am asking the clerk to comment on whether this meeting is in contravention of both Standing Order 108 and the motion that this committee passed yesterday, prohibiting the chair from calling meetings without the consultation and consent of this committee.

What is particularly egregious, I have to say, Mr. Chair, is that you called three of these so-called emergency meetings this week, and not one of the permanent Conservative members of this committee even bothered to show up, ask questions and do their work—

**The Chair:** I will address your point of order, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

• (1010)

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** No one from the opposition leader's front bench bothered to show up to ask questions. That is egregious.

We're here from the Liberal side, the NDP side and and the Bloc side. We're here to do the work of Canadians—

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk, you've made your point of order—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Where are the permanent Conservative members?

**The Chair:** I will rule on your point of order.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Where are the permanent Conservative members of this committee, and why are they not here to do their work?

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I will address your point of order.

I have Mr. Singh on a point of order, and then I will address Mr. Kusmierczyk's.

Be brief, please.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate that you made a ruling on this yesterday, I believe. Mr. Kusmierczyk is once again trying to silence another premier and not let them testify about the harmful impacts of a 23% increase on the carbon tax that's going to make families worse off.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hallan.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** You're the finance critic. You weren't even here yesterday.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Kusmierczyk. To respect the interpreters, and for Mr. Savard-Tremblay, let's have just one person speaking at a time, please.

It is clear—I'll read it—that “Committee meetings are convened by the Chair”, and it can be after “a decision made by the committee or on the Chair’s own authority”. That's right from page 1095 of the green book.

With respect to the motion yesterday, as I stated yesterday, my ruling was that I believed—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Mr. Chair, I asked that question of the clerk.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk, let me finish, please.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I asked the question of the clerk.

**The Chair:** I will stop—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I asked the question of the clerk—

**The Chair:** You do not—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** —and I would like to hear from the clerk.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk, you've been around for a long time. You know very well the rules.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** And I know that I am asking the clerk, not you, sir.

**The Chair:** You do not address questions to the clerk. You know that very well. It appears that you're just being disruptive at this time.

I appreciate what you're saying, but the rules clearly allow the chair to call meetings on his own authority, which I did.

With respect to the motion yesterday, as I ruled yesterday, my belief is that it is for meetings going forward. I don't believe you can simply reach back in time and change what has already been booked. That is my ruling.

If you'd like to hear the clerk's response about the chair's ability to call a meeting, I'm happy to refer it to him. He can repeat from page 1095 himself.

**An hon. member:** I have a point of order, Chair.

**The Chair:** We're actually in a discussion. I'll get to you in a moment.

Go ahead, sir.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Thomas Bigelow):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As you stated, page 1095 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, under the section on convening a meeting by the chair, states the following: “Committee meetings are convened by the Chair acting either on a decision made by the committee or on the Chair's own authority.”

Therefore, my advice to the chair would be that there are two mechanisms to plan a meeting: Either the committee can agree to a schedule and a specific time and plan for a meeting, or the chair has the discretion to plan meetings on his authority.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Okay. I'd like the clerk—

**The Chair:** I realize that someone else called a point of order, but I saw Mr. Sousa's hand up.

Is it on a point of order, Mr. Sousa, or—

**Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.):** It's on this point of order. Yes, it's on a point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, sir.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** I just want clarity again from the clerk. We have an opportunity here that the chair has the right to call these meetings. I understand that, but he also has the right and the need to abide by the members' consent, and—

**The Chair:** We've ruled on that already, Mr. Sousa, so that's not a point of order. Thank you.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** No. Again, I'm asking for—

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, please, Mr. Long.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** I need clarity on the rules.

**The Chair:** The clerk has advised already, Mr. Sousa.

We'd be happy to email it out to you as well if you are having concerns about following along with the conversation.

Go ahead, Mr. Lawrence.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** You need consent to adjourn.

I'm asking a question, Mr. Chair, and now you're trying to shut me down, and that's inappropriate. It's the way you flagrantly operate independently without consulting with the members.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** My question, as a point of order, is for the clerk.

Can the chair—

**The Chair:** Mr. Sousa, you've been around for a long time as well. It pains me to have to repeat this, because it almost feels like you're doing this on purpose, and I'm sure that is not your intent, Mr. Sousa.

You know that you can not ask questions of the clerk. They should be directed to the chair.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Through you, Chair, to the clerk—

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk has already asked about page 29, and I've ruled on it.

If you need the clerk to repeat that to you, I will get him to. It appears you're doing this on purpose, either to disrupt the committee or for some bizarre film clip. I'm not sure, but I'll have him repeat it if you wish.

• (1015)

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Mr. Chair, that's not the intent here. My intent is to provide decorum in this committee to ensure that we operate collectively and co-operatively. Right now, unilateral decisions are being made by you, even with yesterday's adjournment of the debate when we had a motion before the House.

I'm asking the clerk, through you, to tell us if consent was required to do so.

**The Chair:** I adjourned on—

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Chair.

**The Chair:** You can't have a point of order during a point of order and you can't point-of-order a point of order.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** It's a point of order in the queue.

**The Chair:** I adjourned on disorder. I'll read the section. It reads:

Disorder and misconduct in a committee may arise as a result of the failure to abide by the rules and practices of a committee or to respect the authority of the Chair. Disorder and misconduct also include the use of unparliamentary language—

—which we had yesterday—

—failure to yield the floor—

—which we had yesterday—

—or persistent interruption...

That is directly from the green book. I can have the clerk reaffirm what's in the green book for you, if you wish, but that was it.

**The Clerk:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Under the section “Committees and Questions of Procedure and Privilege”, as stated by the chair, it says, “Disorder and misconduct in a committee may arise as a result of the failure to abide by the rules...or to respect the authority of the Chair. Disorder and miscon-

duct also include the use of unparliamentary language”. I would cite also page 1099, in chapter 20, stating, “The committee Chair [may] adjourn the meeting...[if] the Chair decides that a case of disorder or misconduct is so serious as to prevent the committee from continuing its work.”

**The Chair:** Thanks.

I have Mr. Long and then Mr. Naqvi.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning.

I'm puzzled, Mr. Chair.

This is obviously.... I'm happy to be here on OGGO—

**The Chair:** What's your point of order, Mr. Long?

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Well, Mr. Chair, I'm confused. Why is the Premier of New Brunswick here with respect to the main estimates? Can you explain that?

Also, Mr. Chair, I'm wondering if you're able to table any conversations or emails that led to the premier being invited here for the main estimates.

I have questions on the main estimates that I can certainly ask the Premier of New Brunswick, but—

**The Chair:** Mr. Long, I'd ask you to get to your point of order, please.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** —I'm confused as to why the Premier of New Brunswick is invited here when we're supposed to be discussing the main estimates. Can you explain that to me, Chair?

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Certainly. As was explained yesterday, we are on the main estimates. There is over \$11 billion in spending related to the carbon tax, which is about a 66% increase from just two years ago and I think about a 35% increase from last year, so it is a discussion on items within the main estimates. Seven of the premiers—

**Mr. Wayne Long:** What I—

**The Chair:** Mr. Long, I respected your time. I would ask you not to interrupt me. Allow me to continue, please.

Seven of the 10 premiers wrote to the Liberal finance committee chair asking for a meeting to discuss this. He refused, so I thought it would be good for the Canadians who are represented by these seven out of the 10 premiers to allow the premiers to speak on the issue. That is why. They are ready to speak on this.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Chair, I'm not clear on where—

**The Chair:** I can't help it if you're not clear on that, Mr. Long. I have explained why.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Therefore you're telling me, Chair—

**The Chair:** I'm going to Mr. Naqvi.

Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Chair, I have the floor right now.

Chair, are you telling me that the Premier of New Brunswick is able to answer questions from us on the main estimates? Is that not why we're here, Chair?

**The Chair:** Mr. Long, the premiers representing 70% of Canadians have been invited to speak. It is not for you to decide their relevance as witnesses, just like you could not question the relevance, perhaps, of the Parliamentary Budget Officer being here yesterday. I have advised you why.

We will now go to Mr. Naqvi.

Go ahead, sir.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Thank you, Chair.

I'm not trying to be disruptive. I'm just trying to understand the rules of this committee and other committees. There's an element of precedent-setting that takes place when a particular committee acts in a particular way. I'm trying to understand which rules we are acting under here today. I'm asking the question of you. If the clerk can answer that question, I would sincerely appreciate it.

I would also sincerely appreciate it, Chair, if you did not point to an answer for the clerk to read. I don't think that's fair. The clerk is an expert in parliamentary procedure and he should be able to answer the questions without your guiding him to exactly which answer he should be reading.

Having said that, I'm looking at the motion that this committee passed just yesterday, and I will quickly read it. It says—

• (1020)

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Mr. Chair, this is—

**The Chair:** Would you please, Mr. Naqvi, get to your point of order?

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Sir, I am getting to the point of order.

**The Chair:** I understand what the Liberals are trying to do. They're trying to block Premier Higgs from testifying.

Please just get to the point of order.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** With all due respect, that is not my intention.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** No. we're not trying to block the premier.

I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk, we already have someone on the floor. I've already mentioned this point with respect to Mr. Savard-Tremblay and the interpreters. I have asked people not to talk across the floor.

Go ahead, Mr. Naqvi.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Thank you, Chair. I appreciate it.

I am speaking to my point of order, because the motion that was adopted by this committee yesterday speaks to that exact point. It expressed its disappointment in the chair for his disregard for the members and his duties as chair. It stated, "That, when the committee undertakes to invite witnesses, (a) a witness list submission deadline be set by the chair with explicit consent of the committee, (b) witnesses be invited proportionately to each recognized party's standing in the House, and (c) no such witnesses shall be invited without instructions of the committee."

I'll ask you first, Chair, and then the clerk, whether this motion is being respected. I have not seen any documentation that suggests to me that all of these three things, which were just adopted by this committee yesterday, are being undertaken as they relate to witnesses today and moving forward.

I think I know you well, sir. You're a respectful member of Parliament. You would not act in contravention of a motion of your own committee.

I want some clarity on what steps were followed to meet these conditions.

I would also like to hear from the clerk, without your pointing and answering for him.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** There was no pointing or directing, but I appreciate that incorrect perspective.

The motion yesterday, as I made very clear, I don't believe is retroactive. The meeting had already been called. A notice had already been put up. Witnesses were already invited. Nowhere in the notice did it say "retroactive". That was that. The meeting was booked and the witnesses had been called, period.

I'm not sure if you want to ask the clerk to weigh in on that. I'm not sure he hasn't been.

Please go ahead, sir.

**The Clerk:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As you stated, I would leave it to the chair and to the committee to interpret the motion and how it should be used moving forward. At this point, I would echo what the chair stated, which was that the notice was indeed published before this motion was adopted.

That said, based on the terms of the motion, I would leave it to the chair and the committee to decide how to interpret the mechanism and the way to move forward with the motion as it stands. At this point, I would not deem to interpret whether or not today's meeting applies to this motion. I leave it to the chair and the committee to decide how to move forward on that point.

**The Chair:** Next we have Mr. Kusmierczyk, Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Savard-Tremblay.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I was hoping to get the second part of my question answered, which the clerk provided in his testimony, which I do appreciate.

Again, we're all ready to—

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk, can we get to the point of order, please?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Yes. I was just saying thank you for finally responding to—

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk, please get to your point of order.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** —the questions that I have. That's it. Thank you.

Let's continue on with the questions.

**The Chair:** I'll go to Mr. Lawrence and then Mr. Savard-Tremblay, please.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** It's clear what the Liberals are doing. They've raised a number of non-points of order. It's time to hear from Premier Higgs. As he said, he's not interested in a partisan dispute or argument, and neither am I. I'm interested in hearing the representative of New Brunswick. Others may laugh at that, but I want to hear what he has to say.

**The Chair:** Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have the floor.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Mr. Chair, I'm not going to join in the mudslinging, especially since I don't want to get my new jacket dirty.

Nevertheless, my question is pretty simple. Could you please confirm that the committee is not meeting next week? I'd also like to know who our witnesses will be when we get back from the break.

[English]

**The Chair:** There will be no meeting next week. Our next meetings are on April 8 and April 10. You may correct me on the order, but I believe that the first meeting is on Canada Post and the second meeting is on the red tape reduction study. It may be red tape reduction on April 8 and then Canada Post on April 10, but I believe Canada Post is first.

Premier Higgs, we'll go back to you, sir.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Sir, I have one more point of order.

**The Chair:** Sorry, Premier.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Sorry, Premier.

I was just reflecting on the words the clerk was saying in response to my point of order. I heard him say that it is up to the committee members to determine the interpretation of the motion passed—

**The Chair:** It's the chair or the committee members.

• (1025)

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** I think he said both chair and committee members—

**The Chair:** Yup.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** —because with all due respect to you, sir, the chair does not act in isolation.

**The Chair:** What's the point of order, please, sir?

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** The point of order is that there was a clear intention on the part of the committee members when they passed the

motion yesterday that it would apply to all witnesses retrospectively as well, so they—

**The Chair:** This is debate. It's been cleared up.

Mr. Naqvi, we appreciate that. I have stated very clearly that there's nothing that the motion said was retroactive. If it did, it would be killing the NDP study next week and the Liberal study on the red tape.

Premier Higgs, go ahead, please.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As I said, I don't want to make this a political discussion. I want to make it about.... We all don't like the carbon tax. I think we can all agree in part that we don't like the carbon tax. However, we all have the same focus: How do we reduce emissions? How do we make a major impact on climate change for the better? That's the goal that we are aligned on.

The point I'm reacting to here is mostly in relation to the Prime Minister's comments here just recently about giving them a solution and that they're open to solutions. What we're seeing as an opportunity here in New Brunswick is exactly what's happening in the west in relation to the development of LNG, the shipment of LNG worldwide and the shutdown of coal plants.

The Prime Minister stated that there's no business case in New Brunswick. That's absolutely not true. The situation is that we have a business case, but we don't currently have a gas supply, and that is the issue: the gas supply.

Is it economical to bring it from the west or to bring it from the U.S.? No, it hasn't proven to be, based on the cost of transportation. However, it is economical to develop our very own resource here in New Brunswick. It's economical because we have 77 trillion standard cubic feet here in our province. With a consolidated effort from the federal government and the first nations, we can have an impact around the world by shutting down coal plants—coal plants that are built at record numbers in China at 80 to 100 per year, the 174 coal plants or so that exist in Europe and the coal plants even in Atlantic Canada that are running. There are four of them in Atlantic Canada that could be shut down, and there'd be a 50% reduction if we did that.

My plea here is across party lines. Let's think bigger. Let's look at Canada as a solution with a world environmental impact that changes the reductions—

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I have a point of order, Chair.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** —as opposed to—

**Mr. Wayne Long:** A point of order.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** —being exactly focused on our internal affordability and the costs every day of living in our province—

**Mr. Wayne Long:** A point of order.

**The Chair:** I apologize, Premier Higgs. There's a point of order.

Mr. Long, please make it brief.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Chair.

Again, Chair, I'm confused on relevance. Again—

**The Chair:** This is an opening statement, Mr. Long. Please show respect for the premier. You may have disagreements with us, but please show respect for the premier of your province.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Chair, I certainly do have respect for the premier of the province.

**The Chair:** This is an opening statement. Let him finish.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Again, I'm wondering about the relevance.

I'm also wondering, Chair, if you can explain again which of the votable items referred to in the committee contain the Canada carbon rebate. I'm confused. Are you able to let us know that, sir?

**The Chair:** We explained that yesterday, Mr. Long. That's not a point of order.

Premier Higgs, go ahead, sir.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to continue on the affordability point.

We are one of the few nations that has the opportunity to have it all. We have the resources, which we've always thrived on. We have the ability to have a major climate change impact beyond our borders and beyond the 1.5% of emissions that we're currently focused on internally. We would do what other countries are doing to take advantage of offsetting coal plants, as well as offsetting demands in Europe for oil and gas from Russia. We have the ability in Canada to think bigger and make an impact around the world.

While we can develop these resources, we can use them to develop new technology; to build better, cleaner environmental industries and to actually reduce the impact and the everyday cost to people living and working in the province, which means, ultimately, reducing the carbon tax.

It's not an isolated solution. It's a solution that has a broader impact around the world, and it can be proven very clearly that it has a huge impact on the reduction of emissions worldwide. We may want to think we're going to solve the problems in our own little bubble, but we are not. I only ask the Prime Minister and all of you to let us have the opportunity. Let science look at what potential we can really have to reduce emissions and how we can play a major role on the world scene.

Thank you.

• (1030)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Premier Higgs.

We'll start with Mr. Bragdon.

Welcome to the OGGO committee, Mr. Bragdon. The floor is yours for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Premier.

I'm sorry that you had to experience the inner wranglings of partisanship here at the beginning of our committee deliberations today.

I'll move quickly here. Canadians, including those in New Brunswick, are speaking very loudly from coast to coast, so we understand very clearly that the cost of the carbon tax is prohibitive. Most Canadians are worse off as a result of its impact on their standard of living and their ability to make ends meet at the end of each month. The PBO has made that very clear.

Seven out of 10 premiers, including you, have called for this hike in the carbon tax to be spiked. They also want immediate relief and would prefer that this tax be axed altogether.

It's punitive. It's prohibitive. It disproportionately affects those of us who live in small towns and rural communities, and there are a lot of those small towns and rural communities here in New Brunswick. It also inhibits development and growth in our industries, especially within our agricultural and natural resource sectors, which, of course, has an impact here in New Brunswick. There are a lot of impacts of the carbon tax overall. I want to give you a lot of ramp to talk about that.

Also, we're hearing very loudly that seniors who are on fixed incomes—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Bragdon. I'll stop your time.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, please go ahead.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I wanted to ask my honourable colleague a question. I really do appreciate and enjoy working with him, but can he just point to relevance to any of the votes that we are studying in the main estimates?

As a committee, we are asked to study parts of the main estimates. Can he point to the relevance, the actual—

**The Chair:** The question should be to the chair, and not to other members, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

You're aware, as you've been here for a long time and you've participated in many meandering filibusters, that we always allow a wide latitude.

Please continue, Mr. Bragdon.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** This is beyond latitude, Mr. Chair. This has nothing to do with any of the—

**The Chair:** Mr. Bragdon has the floor. Would you allow him to...?

Again, please, for the sake of and respect for our interpreters and those listening through interpretation, one person has the floor at a time.

Mr. Bragdon, go ahead, sir.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.



To continue, Premier, we also know the impact this has on seniors with fixed incomes. Their cost of living keeps going up, yet their incomes are fixed. This is having a huge consequence across the country on everything from heating to groceries, obviously, to the cost of living and the price to fill up a car.

I'll end with this point, Mr. Premier. We have such amazing potential in New Brunswick and across Canada. The taxes and regulatory overreach that this current federal government is putting on our industry sectors and on our natural resources and agriculture are prohibitive to our development and growth as a province.

With that, it's over to you, Premier. Thank you for being here.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Thank you for the question.

I guess in relation to the cost, by 2030 we'll quadruple our tax costs related to the carbon tax, the clean fuel standard tax and their relation to the HST that goes with that. Is it getting more expensive to live and work in our country? Absolutely. Are we spending way too much money across the country? If you wonder how this gets to main estimates or what's the point of it all, we're spending money we don't have as a nation. We have the opportunity to offset that with real benefits in reducing the emissions and having an impact worldwide.

My point continuously is that we don't need to put the burden of climate action and climate change on the citizens of our country and on the citizens of, in my case, this province. We have the ability to fund it and provide the funds for technology to help people deal with affordability and to help people deal with situations that they're finding too difficult to meet in terms of everyday needs.

My issue is clear: Let's look at options. We need to think bigger. Our situation in Canada is that we're too isolated in our bubble. We're not reaching our potential to help the world. We're causing a huge financial impact right across this country on our citizens. It's unnecessary. We all have the same objective. We just have to figure out an easier way to get there, and a reality, in a way, to get there. Currently, this path is not reality. It's not how we're going to manage the future and meet our goals.

For me, that is the point of all this discussion. Look at the science. Look at the development of SMRs. Look at hydrogen. It's all well and good, but the timing is not going to meet the needs of what the current schedule provides. As a result, people are just going to pay more and pay more. What will the impact on the environment be? Will it be 8% of our 1.5%? Do we think we'll be solving the problems of the world by doing that when we could probably make an impact worldwide of 10% or 15%? That's a calculated number that could be very easily understood.

I want to continue to argue that we just need to let the science let us help the world reduce emissions and not think we're solving it by our own little bubble calculation.

● (1035)

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Mr. Premier, I have a quick question to follow up. I'm wondering if the Prime Minister and his cabinet have been regularly reaching out to you and other first ministers and talking about the pain this carbon tax is obviously having on Canadians and how it could be mitigated.

Is there regular communication from the Prime Minister and his cabinet on this?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Well, there are various discussions internally, and I guess with members locally, but the solutions are only about how we offset this measure and that measure, when in fact you have to get to the root cause of why we have this measure to begin with.

Then you get down to the philosophy of the federal government in relation to the carbon tax and you ask if it is achieving what it is intended to achieve. What was this unintended consequence in the affordability of everything, from groceries right down the supply chain? Was that the intended consequence? If it was, it's a poorly implemented process.

What are other countries doing? How do they manage this? How can we manage it, based on our abilities, and utilize our entire natural resources to be part of that solution?

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** That's great.

Mr. Chair, do I have a little bit more time?

**The Chair:** You have 13 seconds.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** All right.

Mr. Premier, speaking of the potential that we have as a province, what immediate impact would removing the carbon tax it have? Perhaps you can give a quick answer to that.

**The Chair:** You have a couple of seconds, Premier Higgs.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Immediately, 20¢ or roughly 17¢ per litre would have a huge impact, but then, going the full distance, down the road it could take off about 40¢ or 50¢ or 60¢ a litre by 2030.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Premier Higgs.

Mrs. Atwin, go ahead, please.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us, Premier Higgs. I have just six minutes, so I will be going pretty fast with my questions. I'm not trying to be rude.

I note today that in the provincial legislature there was to be a debate on removing the provincial sales tax from the looming increases in electricity costs that we'll be seeing in the province on April 1. Your party denied that debate. You're here with us instead. Is this a case of "look over here and not what I have control over back at home"?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** No. What we have control over is a reactionary process to what we're seeing across the country in terms of increased costs. That was my point in relation to having a policy that incurs a counterpolicy to offset a poor policy. That's the issue.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** I'm sorry. I have to keep going.

Premier Higgs, when you decided to drop the New Brunswick carbon pricing system, you said at the time, during your press conference, "We know that recently and especially over the last few months, New Brunswickers have been feeling the impact of inflation and are struggling with the higher prices on everything from food to fuel. By changing our approach, we can help New Brunswickers get money back into their pockets in the form of a quarterly rebate cheque from the federal government."

I happen to agree with you, Premier, but I see that you've recently changed your stance on this, so is it—

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** No, I haven't changed my stance.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** —the case that you're more interested in playing politics than actually looking after affordability for New Brunswickers and tackling climate change?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** On the contrary, I think playing politics is what I've witnessed here in the last half-hour.

The point of the issue on the carbon tax is saying that if we adopt the backstop, then people will get a cheque. Is that cheque offsetting the real costs they have? No, it's not.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Can you table that information to show us the calculations?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** With the calculation going right through to groceries, to the cost of commodities.... It's more than fuel.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Could you share that information with us?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Yes, I think there's a recent study, perhaps by the Fraser Institute, showing the impact of the carbon tax. I don't know what the Bank of Canada has said recently, but there are many studies showing that. I'm sure there is other relevant data.

• (1040)

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Sir, how much is the average rebate for a New Brunswicker, including the 20% rural top-up?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** It's around \$200 quarterly, I think, in that range. It's about \$700 a year, or \$736 a year.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** You have a Twitter post here about your appearance today. You mentioned participating in the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to relay your concerns and "put a stop to this tax grab once and for all."

Sir, are you familiar with the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Somewhat, but maybe not as familiar as you are at this stage.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Section 2.2 of the 2019 annual report on the act is titled "Return of Pollution Pricing Fuel Charge Proceeds to Jurisdictions". It breaks down the rebate process: 90% of "the fuel charge proceeds are returned directly to individuals and families" through the Canada carbon rebate, and the "remainder of the fuel charge proceeds are returned through federal programming to support schools, hospitals, small and medium-sized businesses, colleges and universities, municipalities".

Which of the projects would you not like to see supported? There are energy retrofits for indigenous communities' infrastructure, and

we have schools that are bringing down their pollution in general and they're actually saving money on their bills. Would you like to see these programs cancelled, along with the rebates?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I think we were providing supports through a lot of initiatives to these different communities prior to a carbon tax ever coming in. I don't think that creating more hurt for people in order to provide more federal money to distribute as they would see fit is a solution. I don't think that just charging people more so the federal government can have more say in where the money is distributed is a policy.... You should not hurt one group in order to distribute to another.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Premier, this article says, "The New Brunswick government passed legislation in 2022 to allow oil companies to pass clean fuel charges onto consumers and instructed the Energy and Utilities Board to determine what those [hypothetical] costs might be." An independent analysis determined that here in New Brunswick we are "compensating companies for costs that do not exist", overcharging New Brunswickers at the pump anywhere from 5.6¢ to eight cents a litre.

How much of this is rebated back to New Brunswickers?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Mrs. Atwin, are you familiar with the fact that we have regulated pricing here in New Brunswick, in Nova Scotia, in Newfoundland and in P.E.I.?

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** It's actually my questioning time, so I'd like you to answer the question I asked.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Let's put all the facts on the table, because every one of those provinces under—

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Why is it okay to give money to oil and gas companies and not to New Brunswickers?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Let me answer your question. Every one of those provinces raised its prices when the clean fuel standard came into play—every one of them—and our price is the cheapest in Atlantic Canada. Why did they do that?

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** But that money is not rebated back to New Brunswickers.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I'll tell you why they did that. It's because the regulated pricing formula includes regulated changes to industry that are brought down by government. That's why they did that. Our change was only to reflect the same logic that other regulated pricing has. Now, we could argue whether regulated pricing makes sense or doesn't make sense.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Yet we see more expensive gas in New Brunswick than in the rest of the country.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** No. I'm telling you that the same thing was raised in the other three provinces. Maybe you missed that, because it seems to have not been talked about much. Regulated pricing accounts for a complete addition of all the incurred costs in order to arrive at the retail price.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Do you disagree with the independent analysis, which says that we're overcharging New Brunswickers at the pump?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** We have the EUB looking at that. That's the purpose.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Sir, we've seen that greenhouse gas emissions have come down by 8%. You've mentioned that this policy has done nothing and there's no measurable impact, but the Canadian Climate Institute would disagree.

Are you prepared to table a plan for New Brunswick that could achieve similar or better results?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Worldwide, absolutely.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** For Canada.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Well, Canada, that's the whole point—we're thinking in a bubble. Do you think that, if China is building 80 to 90 coal plants a year that would dwarf anything we can do in Canada, we're safe and we're solving climate change—

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** So you don't think we should do anything in Canada.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I propose to make a difference worldwide that we can actually achieve. We can—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt, Premier Higgs.

That is our time, Mrs. Atwin.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have six minutes. Go ahead, sir.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here and for sharing your views, Mr. Higgs. I'm not going to ask you about the carbon tax, simply because it doesn't affect Quebec. I'd rather focus on other topics.

Let's start with the transfers related to the Official Languages Act. How much support does New Brunswick get for its linguistic minority?

[*English*]

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I don't know the exact number, but it is significant.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** It's a significant amount.

In concrete terms, how does that money help francophone communities in New Brunswick?

[*English*]

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Well, certainly in our case, we have two school systems that are operated through that. There are cultural centres that are set up because of that. We have obviously the francophone Vitalité and Horizon, two health networks in the province.

We see culturally a real advantage in New Brunswick. I see an advantage that we're certainly not utilizing to its full extent. I have said from the beginning that I wanted to see better results in our anglophone school system so we could actually have every child graduating fluently bilingual, at least conversationally. My goal is that if we are truly a bilingual province, we all should be graduating kids to better speak in both languages. The money that's used to enhance francophone programs and cultural centres is welcome from the federal government, and we do utilize it.

I might add another point. We also increased our francophone immigration through COVID and beyond when we were looking to maintain the ratio of francophones here in the province and not let that slide. It runs at around 33%. In the last couple of years, we have immigrated more francophone immigrants than any government for a long period of time, and we've increased our percentage.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Thank you.

You say you'd like to see better results. Is it a matter of not having enough funding, or does it have more to do with how the funding is allocated?

[*English*]

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Well, as I've said probably many times, measuring the performance of money actually sent out is always difficult. It's more of a headline on how much money was spent than how much was achieved. That doesn't apply only to the francophone...or to money from Ottawa in that regard. I'll mention it in relation to the current announcement regarding health support and the \$480 million, I think, over 10 years. While it is great to see that, when you think about \$48 million per year falling into several buckets in the province, will it be noticed in the \$3.8-billion budget for us? It would be certainly less so in a bigger province.

My point is that we need a clinical information system in our province, and it will be about a billion dollars. I would like to see targeted money as it comes from the federal government, because we can't do all this stuff otherwise. I would like to see us focus on real change in health care and be able to put it in a major solution that will have a significant impact.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** I was actually asking about linguistic minorities, but I was getting to health care.

The provinces joined forces in calling on the government to increase health transfers with no strings attached. Would you mind quickly going over what you were asking for?

[English]

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Well, we would prefer to have no strings attached, for sure. I think some provinces achieved that. I don't think we did, but we were clear that we would identify exactly where the money was going. Many of the items we could agree on, in that sense. That's where we provided that information on where we would use it, and that was accepted.

I'd go back to game-changers in health. I feel like health is our biggest challenge. It's the biggest challenge in any election. It's the biggest challenge federally or provincially, even though we know it's a provincial responsibility. But we can make some big game-changing improvements in our health care across this country. A lot of that comes with sharing data. A lot of that comes with an information system that can flow not only around the province but also around the entire country and that helps us get better and learn from each other's experiences.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

[English]

**The Chair:** You have about a minute and 20 seconds.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** All right.

I hear you, Mr. Higgs. You said that you didn't get the funding without strings, but that you agreed on the areas where the money would go. Looking at it, though, I see that the funding the government announced didn't match what you were asking for. Is that right?

[English]

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** We were given a suite of things that the money could be used for. My preference would be to put it in clinical information and management systems, because I think that's what will make the biggest impact.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Very good. Thank you.

I'm going to switch topics now. I told you I wasn't going to ask you about the carbon tax, but I do want to ask you what you're proposing as an alternative and why you aren't joining the carbon market and the carbon exchange.

• (1050)

[English]

**The Chair:** You'll have to give a brief answer, Premier Higgs.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** The other solutions are very evident. They went through them at great length. I think the other solution is for

us to get outside of our bubble, to think bigger, to think about impacting the world emissions and what we can do with our tremendous energy sources here in Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr. Bachrach, I'd say that I hope you're feeling better, but you're probably still under the weather.

Go ahead for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** I'll do my best. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us, Premier Higgs.

Premier, you started your remarks by talking about the cost of living for New Brunswickers. Certainly, the cost of living for Canadians is something that everyone on this committee is concerned about.

In 2022, when inflation was even higher than it is now, people were struggling with the cost of living, and Canada's big corporations were making record profits. There was one analysis by an economist by the name of David Macdonald, and he found that for every dollar spent on those higher prices, 47¢ was converted to corporate profits. Now, 25¢ of that dollar went to corporate profits in just four industries, the leading one of which was oil and gas. For every additional dollar in inflationary costs, a quarter of that was going to the corporate profits of the companies that are producing and selling gasoline to consumers.

I'm wondering, when this was happening, when these corporations were gouging Canadian consumers and New Brunswickers, did you speak out publicly on behalf of New Brunswickers?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I have said all along that I think industry has to do its part and has to produce the cleanest energy, with the lowest energy consumption to do so and with the lowest emissions.

I think the point—

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** To be fair, sir, I'm not talking about emissions here. I'm talking about the cost of living and the costs consumers are paying at the pump. Did you speak out and say that corporate profits are too high?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I'm not familiar with the specifics of where the profits lay in the ratios that you just described, but I would say this: I think that we need to look at the cost of operating in our country and the cost of keeping businesses here. We've seen a huge exodus of businesses, particularly out west in Alberta, and we know the alternative. We know the alternative right here in New Brunswick. If you reference oil and gas, we know that we can buy refined product from countries that have no environmental standards at all, but we're still using the product.

We can make that choice of whether we want to buy from less... They're not less efficient, but they're countries where we would not subscribe to their practices in any way, shape or form. There's the challenge that you have in the industry because, as you push—and I'm not saying that you shouldn't have full visibility into that because I think that's important—you will see that our operations are likely the cleanest in the world. So where do you go? Can we get better? Absolutely. Should profits pay for that in a company? Absolutely. However, we do know that for any producer of a commodity, the prices end up in the consumers' hands. Unless we control those companies as state-owned companies, then that's where it comes, and we know that.

The balance is between how we keep companies operating, maintaining their facilities, and staying here and how we have a fair price that they pay for operating in our country. That has to be looked at in great detail. It's nothing that I can just do politically and say, "We should do this."

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I guess what I'm trying to get at, Premier, is that you've been very vociferous about the carbon price and the impact on consumers. If you look at these things proportionately, if you look at the impact of the carbon price on the price of gas, or if you look at the contribution of the carbon tax to inflation, and then at the numbers from the Bank of Canada, which I'm sure you're familiar with, analysis shows that 47¢ of the inflationary dollar went toward corporate profits. We have the Bank of Canada saying that 0.15% of inflation is caused by carbon pricing. Those seem to be vastly disparate numbers. I'm asking about the clear price-gouging by oil and gas companies.

I looked at GasBuddy and looked at New Brunswick. The price of gas in New Brunswick has gone up 20¢ since January. The federal government is talking about 3¢ as of April 1. I'm wondering if you've spoken out on behalf of New Brunswickers, who are getting gouged at the pump by these oil and gas companies that are raking in massive profits.

• (1055)

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Maybe you know how the pricing model works. Basically, it's [*Inaudible—Editor*] market where the regulated pricing is set, and then the calculations go beyond that.

What I do know for sure is that 20¢ of that right now is carbon tax. By 2030, 62¢ of that will be carbon tax. That goes to the federal government in a circle program that is supposed to be solving climate change.

We do know that, don't we? In 2030, 60¢ will be sent to the federal government. Why? What is that achieving? Maybe there's a combination to look at everything, but we do know how to take 60¢ a litre off the price of commodities at the pumps and what people are paying.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I guess I was hoping, Premier Higgs, that you would speak out against the corporate price-gouging, which is really the factor that's costing New Brunswickers so much. But I'll move on to another question.

Pierre Poilievre has said that a Conservative government would not pull Canada out of the Paris Agreement. Is that a position that you support?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I think there's a focused need to continue on the emission reduction program, and if the Paris accord is... You know, it's important to carry on in that program. I'm not suggesting that we pull out of anything. My suggestion is simply for us to be broader than Canada, to think bigger about the impact.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** That's fine. We all want to think globally. But to be clear—

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** But we're not. We're not thinking globally. We're not even pretending to think globally.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Premier Higgs, you said that you support staying in the Paris Agreement. The Paris Agreement is almost entirely predicated on reducing domestic emissions.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Bachrach. We're over time. Can you wrap up your question, please, sir?

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I will. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Are you saying, Premier Higgs, that you think we should stay in this international agreement but not live up to its core tenets?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I'm saying that we can do so much better. If we are sitting idle, costing people more money, and we're not impacting the world emissions, then whom are we fooling? Maybe the Paris accord should be modified to say that those nations that can have a greater impact should have the opportunity to do so.

If you do a comparison—

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'm sorry to cut you off, but we're past time, I'm afraid.

Mr. Ellis, welcome to OGGO. You have five minutes, sir.

**Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair. It's good to be back at OGGO.

Mr. Premier, thanks for being here today on this very important topic.

I grew up in New Brunswick, and I'm happy to be representing Nova Scotia in Cumberland—Colchester. Our premier here, Premier Houston, said the carbon tax is misguided and unfair. We know very clearly that those of us who choose to live rurally suffer significantly from the carbon tax. Could you talk, sir, about the stories you've heard from the New Brunswickers you represent? Certainly, I'm getting stories every single day about the affordability problem.

If you could comment on that, Premier, I would appreciate that.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Well, certainly, there's no question about that. We are a sparsely populated province. We don't have the mass transit systems. We don't have the subways. The idea is that people use their vehicles every day to get to and from work, so it has a greater impact on a province like ours. It's a reality.

Yes, we hear it every day when people spend more. We have a greater demand every day. How do we offset this high cost? How do we do this differently? That becomes the whole argument around the carbon tax. When we say what it's actually achieving, 8% of the 1.5% of world emissions, it's saying that we're taking a lot of hurt because of this ideological approach to emissions in the world, or climate change. Are we really going to make a difference in Canada?

I guess the point is that I just don't see the value in continuing to find a way to mitigate a very poor policy. Fighting this carbon tax is a reality. We know what people think across this country. They believe in climate change. We can provide a solution. The Prime Minister asked for a solution. I think I've outlined a real possibility here to make a major impact, and we're stuck on saying, "No, no—carbon tax." But I'm sure you're not getting that in any one of your ridings, because this affordability is real. When you stop at the pumps, when you go into the grocery stores, when you go to the lumber stores, when you buy anything that involves transportation and getting it to New Brunswick, transportation is in everything that we buy and sell.

The important part here is this: Let's face the reality of what it means to everyday people. I'm saying 20¢ right now, or 17.6¢, off the pumps immediately would be a real start. We're evaluating regulated pricing to see if we're better off without it. We've had it 20 years. The idea is that we know that 60¢ is coming and we know that it will continue to get worse. Let's fix it now, make a difference and still impact the world's emissions in a positive way.

• (1100)

**Mr. Stephen Ellis:** Thank you very much, Premier Higgs. That was very insightful on behalf of all your constituents out there.

It's interesting, sir; we talked a bit about the rebate, of course, that our Liberal colleagues want to say is so great. Do you think we actually have an understanding of how much this actually costs everyday people from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia? The carbon tax, as you mentioned, is applied to everything we have that comes via supply chains. Do you think we have a good understanding of exactly the unbelievable extent to which the carbon tax is hurting Atlantic Canadians and New Brunswickers in particular?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** No, I do not. We talk about the isolated issue at the pump and we're getting a rebate based on what we spend on fuel. Well, that isn't a rebate on groceries. It's not a rebate on hardware purchases or any other purchase. There doesn't seem to be any discussion about that.

This idea that we increase the numbers dramatically in the federal service in order to deliver on a circle program, to actually circle back and think this is a solution, I think has really come to light as the prices go up. On this next one, my colleagues in the government and in opposition say we shouldn't do this, because they're getting

the same message I am. Certainly, the Liberal leader here is saying the same thing: We shouldn't do this. I think that's a pretty big message. The Premier of Newfoundland said the same thing: We shouldn't do this. If they didn't think their own federal government was creating hardship in their province, would they be saying this?

You can say, well, I might say it anyway—

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** I have a point of order.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** —but I'm not saying it anyway. I'm providing a solution to do something better.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mrs. Atwin. I didn't quite hear you. Do you have a point of order?

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm just wondering about the use of props. I see something behind Mr. Ellis that could be in the prop category.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Could you be more specific? My eyes are probably not as strong as yours.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Well, I hate to use the sloganeering of our Conservative colleagues, but I see an "axe the tax" sign right behind him. That would be inappropriate, I think, for the context of today.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Dr. Ellis, perhaps you could just take that down before we proceed.

**Mr. Stephen Ellis:** Well, actually, Chair, that sign might say "axe worthy". It could say "axe throwing". I'm sorry to hear that the member wants to be triggered by that. I happen to have a riding where the Nova Scotia Agricultural College is an incredible proponent of axe throwing, and therefore I believe it's appropriate for me to have that there. I'm not going to comment on the things behind Mrs. Atwin. Maybe there are things I don't like there. Maybe there's something Mr. Savard-Tremblay has on that I don't like. Maybe I don't like the colour of his new jacket. I think that is absolutely ridiculous. Axe throwing is a very important part of life here in Cumberland—Colchester, and I thank the member from Fredericton for pointing that out.

Premier, that being said, it would appear that all of your Atlantic colleagues are speaking out against this, and perhaps unanimously in the legislatures as well. Despite what the Liberals want, it appears very clear, sir, that you have some incredible ideas. I want to thank you for your time here in committee today, your insightfulness, and your great representation of all New Brunswickers. My mom, who's 91, still lives in New Brunswick.

I thank you for that, sir.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Thank you.

**Mr. Stephen Ellis:** Chair, if you'd like to give me some more time, I'm quite happy to have that.

**The Chair:** Sorry, no. We were just following up on the previous point of order. Thanks.

We will now go to you, Mr. Long. Go ahead, sir.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Chair.

Good morning to my colleagues, and good morning to our premier.

It was great to see you, Blaine, at the New Brunswick museum announcement this week. It was a great announcement for our city and certainly for the province.

Premier, why are you here today? Why are you before OGGO, which is studying the main estimates? I'm wondering if you can share with the committee when you were first approached to appear before this committee or any committee. I'm wondering if you can also table any documents about appearing before any committee here.

When were you approached to appear before OGGO?

• (1105)

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** We sent a letter some time ago—as you know, it was seven of my colleagues—about this whole process or about the situation and how we felt collectively. From that point, we learned of this committee and the opportunity to look at the cost of living in Canada and what the government is spending in terms of servicing the country. The idea of having an opportunity to share exactly what we're seeing I think is very relevant for us here in New Brunswick, but as I point out, it's relevant for colleagues from both sides of the table.

Quite frankly, Mr. Long, you should be in the same camp with your colleagues provincially, who are saying we shouldn't have this tax and this increase.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Premier, let me give you an example. I had a guy come into my office the other day. He was telling me about a 23¢ increase in fuel. I said, no, it's not 23¢. It's 23% of basically 9¢. It's 3¢. Then we went through the math. He filled up his Honda Civic. It was 37 litres. It was about \$1.20 extra to fill up his car, which he would actually drive for two weeks. He'd get 500 kilometres from that car. In fact, it was 60¢ extra a week.

Look, Premier, we're all very clear on your wanting to eliminate the price on pollution. What is your solution? Can you share with the committee what you would do? Are you in favour of taxing large emitters and letting those emitters pass it on? Would that not be the same?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I think we've been very clear that our industries should be best in class in terms of emissions reductions and continually investing to reduce emissions. What we know from every commodity, to put it clearly, is that in every commodity and every industry, the cost of that industry into that commodity can end up with the consumer. How do we change that? Do we make them all state-owned? Do we decide that capitalism is no longer an issue here in Canada and so we move to being more socialistic in nature?

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Premier, thank you for that, but again, I'm looking for specifics. What is New Brunswick's plan?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I just went through that.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Would you be able to table a plan to reach our targets by 2050? I know that you've criticized this and that, but I've yet to hear your plan, Premier.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** No, you weren't listening, because I went through it in great detail here in the last 20 minutes. It is very clear. It could be calculated as a major plan right here, developed in New Brunswick, that could have a major impact worldwide. It's clear.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** What's the plan? What is it?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** It's developing our gas resource and that LNG plant that you and I both live close to, and saying we could ship to Europe and shut down coal plants. That's the plan—simple. It would create three million dollars' worth of investment in Saint John. It would create multi-millions of investment. It would be multi-million dollars to the first nations. It's doing exactly what is happening out west.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** That's how we're going to reduce emissions in our province—

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Worldwide.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** —by 2050.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** That's worldwide. We're not thinking big enough. We can't make the impact worldwide by the current closed thinking of just saying, “What about Canada?”

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Premier, you often talk about affordability, and certainly we're on the same page. Look, I don't think there's any question that there's a challenge worldwide with respect to affordability. But you also have a lot of responsibility in the province of New Brunswick with respect to affordability. You've had three surpluses, I would argue, largely due to federal transfers. I also want to make sure, for the record, that our committee and Canadians know that almost nine out of every \$10 of COVID support that came into New Brunswick were federal. New Brunswick contributed to COVID relief less than any other province across Canada.

With respect to your surpluses and affordability, can you name three things you have done, three actions you have taken, to help New Brunswickers with respect to affordability?

Thank you.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Let's talk about COVID.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Premier Higgs. We're almost out of time. Please provide a very brief answer, if you're able to.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I was going to start on the COVID question. We spent every dime that the federal government gave to us, which went toward COVID, as did the other provinces, I assume, but we also added to that where it was needed.

I'd also point out that we had one of the best records on COVID in the country, working with our colleagues in Atlantic Canada, so—

**The Chair:** Thank you, gentlemen. I'm sorry. We are out of time.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, please go ahead.

Ignore what Dr. Ellis says. I think your jacket is perfect.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** I didn't hear his disparaging comment about my jacket, Mr. Chair. I'm definitely going to ask for the meeting transcript afterwards.

Mr. Higgs, you said earlier that you'd like to see the funding go to English-language school boards as well. I'm curious as to how the allocation of federal funding is to blame. Why can't you just adjust your education programming?

[*English*]

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I'm sorry if that's what you got from my message. It is a provincial responsibility. My point was that I would like to see greater results from our schools, greater results in our kids' ability to speak both languages. We are a bilingual province, after all, but our performance really hasn't improved much in that regard in the 50 years of trying to learn a second language. In terms of our education in the English schools, about 30% graduate being bilingual, so 70% don't. If we're a bilingual province, how could that be our record after 50 years?

We know that we have challenges in literacy and numeracy too. That's an ongoing challenge, as are other activities in the school that we're trying to manage. We know that the teachers are going to

make the difference in all that. Finding a way for teachers' voices to be heard is the solution.

That was my point earlier. If that wasn't clear, that's what I was trying to put across.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Thank you.

I'd like some clarification about the 60¢ a litre you cited. Where did you get that number from? You brought up science, but that would basically mean that every litre of gas was equivalent to 1% of a tonne of greenhouse gas emissions, that filling up the tank of a large vehicle would produce a tonne of emissions per fill-up. Is that what you're saying?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have about 10 seconds to respond, Premier Higgs.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** On the fill-up, the point is that going where we are going.... It just keeps adding up. Today, the 23% would make a difference in cars. I'd say that for a new car filling up right now, that would be \$10 more on 50 litres of gas. Looking at where this is headed, by 2030, for bigger vehicles, it would be \$600; for a minivan, \$450; for an SUV, \$420; for a sedan, \$400.

The point of the 62¢ is that 37.5¢ would be carbon tax, 17¢ would be clean fuel standards, and 8¢ on that is HST, which gives you 63¢ by 2030.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Premier Higgs. We are trying to keep to our schedule so that we can get you out on time.

It's back to you, Mr. Bachrach, for two and a half minutes.

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

Premier Higgs, you've talked at length about this idea of selling gas to Europe as part of Canada's contribution to global climate change. I'm wondering about the business case for New Brunswick specifically. You're talking about building massive amounts of infrastructure, shipping the gas across the ocean and selling it to European countries.

Are those European markets to which you're hoping to sell New Brunswick LNG projected to have increasing demand for such gas?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Yes. They are indeed. We have a couple of MOUs. We've had different countries that have asked us if we would sign a 20-year agreement for supply. There's no shortage of demand. When I was in Europe, they said they can't believe Canada is not providing any energy solution for their needs there.



On the point of us building the infrastructure, we already have an LNG plant here in eastern Canada. It's for LNG import. It can be converted for LNG export for around \$2 billion to \$3 billion. Repsol was prepared to do that, but they need a gas supply. We have gas in the province. We have pipelines that are already connecting this gas supply. It's a matter of developing them and utilizing....

You know, we all need to be onside. First nations need to be part of this, for sure. A very moderate expansion on the first nations communities in New Brunswick could have an impact of anywhere between \$800 million and \$1.6 billion. That's just on a very modest expansion of wells that are already in place in the southwestern part of the province.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** In thinking long term, Premier, is the analysis that you're getting showing that there is increasing demand for gas in those European markets?

• (1115)

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Yes. It's showing that they absolutely...hydrogen is.... Before it's any impact—

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** No, not hydrogen. I mean natural gas.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I know, but my point is that there isn't an alternative. That was where I was going with that. There isn't an alternative.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Okay. Back to my original question, you said that you have analysis that shows there's increasing demand for natural gas in European markets. Can you table that analysis with the committee?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Let's put it this way. Let's put the facts.... I could sign tomorrow a 20-year agreement with a country in Europe for gas supply.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Which country is that?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** The Czech Republic was one. We've had others that have.... When I was there, there was the Czech Republic. We've had others that have shown interest, and other countries like the U.S. are building.... Germany is another, because they've built a lot of LNG import facilities. They are building this infrastructure, and they did it in record time. If you looked at the stats, you'd see they put these up in months in order to save gas—

**The Chair:** I apologize, Premier. That is our time.

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

**The Chair:** We'll have to move on. Our last two interventions will be five-minute interventions.

We have Mr. Hallan, and then it will be Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Go ahead, Mr. Hallan.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thanks, Chair.

Thank you, Premier Higgs, for being here. You've joined 70% of Canadians and six other premiers, including a Liberal premier, Andrew Furey, to call on this Liberal-NDP government to spike the hike on April 1 that will raise the carbon tax by 23%, making everything more expensive.

Can you please explain to this committee why you're calling for this and why it's so important to spike the hike?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** It's like putting in a needle. You keep doing it a little bit at a time and you think it doesn't hurt that bad, so you can stand it. All of a sudden you look back and you see that you've added 60¢ a litre to gas. At what point do you bring this thing to reality? The analysis done earlier said it's only going to be 60¢ on a fill-up. Currently, with the 17.6¢ and where we are right now, it relays into an extra \$10 on the total carbon tax to date. Then you keep moving that along to the 60¢ and it becomes more relevant. At some point, you bring it up and say, "Okay, when are we going to realize that this is a punitive tax?" It's not achieving the big picture results, and we think we're saving the world on climate change. That's the point.

We are causing a negative impact on every citizen. You can argue with me or you can look across the country and see seven provinces that are saying this is a problem. You can ask what we can do about it. Seven provinces that are represented by different parties are saying that this is a problem. At some point, you'd like to think there would be an ear to hear this, and we'd say, all right, yes, we're getting deeper now. It's costing more now. It's not just about another three cents in April. It's about all the cumulative effects of the increased cost of energy, particularly in provinces that have no other alternative.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** The PBO once again reiterated yesterday that the carbon tax has a negative impact on families. Can you talk a bit more about the negative impact on families in New Brunswick?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** To me, the issue becomes calculating the full spectrum of what it means to have higher energy costs. We've seen costs go up in every sector. In grocery stores particularly, they have gone up. Building supplies have gone up. Our inflationary costs have gone up. We're seeing a little change in the inflation rate, so let's hope that continues to drop.

In New Brunswick, we've seen assessments go up dramatically, but we've had population growth here for the first time in many years. It's had an impact. The cost of housing is preventing more houses from being built, so people look at it and say, "Is the government going to come up with a solution here to solve the problem?" Let's focus on the problem. Let's get back to the policies that are creating the problem or are certainly having a major impact and making it worse, rather than trying to pretend that we should put on band-aids in order to mitigate a poor policy.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** The Liberal-NDP government consistently says that Canada is the problem.

Premier Higgs, can you please let the Liberal-NDP government know how Canada can be the solution and why it's not the problem?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Yes. What I was saying earlier is about what we're seeing in B.C. and in Alberta with the export of energy and natural gas. What we can do on the east coast is the very same thing: exports of natural gas and LNG.

The issue is that this is a climate action that mitigates the affordability challenge, because the revenue would be used for offsetting costs for people in the province and would be used for technology development. When we develop the technology, people are going to be more acute, more astute, about how they can manage and reduce their emissions.

We talk about the electric cars. We're not able to cope with electric car production or the battery production to meet the requirements for 2035. The point is, let's have a realistic plan to transition through this time period, but let's use our resources to pay for it, rather than everybody's homes, everybody's pockets. Let the resources pay for the change that we all know we must....

• (1120)

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you, Premier.

For my last question, the Governor of the Bank of Canada clearly stated that 0.6% of the overall inflation number in Canada today is contributed by this carbon tax scam, and if we got rid of it, it would put a massive dent in inflation. That might help to lower the interest rates faster after we've seen this government double the cost of mortgages, houses and rents.

Can you please tell us how important it is to axe this tax on housing?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I think it's very important if you look at all these taxes that are being put on buildings, on fuel and on commodities. It all flows into higher costs. I think we just need to rethink our program and what we could do in the world to have the greatest impact.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Premier Higgs.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, go ahead for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much, Premier, for being with us here today and for answering our questions and shedding light on your plan and New Brunswick's plan to address climate change.

I find it interesting that yesterday and today we will have had three premiers testifying before us, three premiers who over the last four years have all dealt with record-setting forest fires.

Saskatchewan, for example, saw 494 fires and about two million hectares burned last year. Obviously, we heard from the premier yesterday. Alberta, last year, had 2.2 million hectares that burned in the greatest forest fires that province has seen: 1,121 wildfires that claimed 2.2 million hectares, which were burned. The city of Edmonton recorded 299 smoke hours last year. The residents of Edmonton had to deal with 299 smoke hours—again a record, far and away. Of course, your own province has seen record forest fires in 2020.

Premier, what is your plan? What is your climate plan?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Once again, my climate plan is to have a bigger impact on world emissions. I think it sounds like many of you are going to be surprised if we reach our 1.8% target in those conditions you just outlined—or better—because they're not going to have any impact at all—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Premier Higgs, what is your plan for New Brunswick? I understand that you have a global plan. What is your plan for New Brunswick?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** We continue to reduce. We have done.... We're well ahead of targets in New Brunswick for emissions reductions and we continue to push in that direction to meet the targets that are put forward. That's the plan. That is on target.

In relation to forest fires, I do want to point out something. The forest industry is a big issue for New Brunswick. We're number one in Canada for forest products on a GDP per capita: our 900 companies directly in the forestry sector, 24,000 full-time jobs.... The reason I'm saying all of that is not only to identify the economic benefit but to identify the benefit of managing forests. In many cases, the reason that forests are.... We have climate change. We have drier conditions. No one is denying any of that, but when you let old forests—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Premier, I do apologize, but I'm not hearing a plan here. I'm just hearing words.

Mr. Chair, I am going to share my time with my colleague, Ms. Atwin. I'll just pass my questions over to her.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Ms. Atwin, you have two minutes.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Premier Higgs, I want to pick up on a piece you mentioned about the forestry sector, for example. I know that we have sustained use of aerial spraying of glyphosate in the province, which has actually created a monoculture in our forestry sector and which could actually lead to more susceptible conditions for forest fires. To point to that as a big piece of that plan is concerning to me.

You also mentioned indigenous communities and the potential for natural gas exploration. I would remind you that there were significant demonstrations and protests across the province during that time because it wasn't something that indigenous communities wanted in their backyards. Has that relationship changed at all? I'd like some insight on that piece.

• (1125)

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** I would think that the reality is starting to set in that this is a huge economic benefit. It's done across the country, particularly in B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan. The idea of the development of natural gas is not new. It's well established. The impact it can have on world emissions is well established. Yes, I would like to think the first nations are learning more about this so they understand economically and environmentally what it could mean. That is the process that is under way, but we certainly could make an impact with the federal government being part of that.

I want to go back to the forestry comment and the glyphosate. The biggest use of glyphosate is in farming and agriculture—

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** But we're talking about the forestry sector—

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** You can't have one without the other. It might be easier to talk about forestry right now, but the whole point—

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Aerial spraying—

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Aerial spraying is mostly in agriculture, and in the forestry sector I want to point out the fact that—

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Does it not create a monoculture, though, that makes our forests more susceptible to forest fires—

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** No, no....

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** —and threatens biodiversity, which should be part of any climate plan?

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** No.

Let me answer. It was my question—was it not?

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** It's my time, actually, sir.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** All right. It's your time and my answer, then.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Please, go ahead. I'd like the answer to that.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** The idea is that we have the lowest loss in Canada for land lost by fire. That is, we're number one in Canada for forest products. I said that, but we are also a recognized leader in forest fire protection. What's the reason for that? It's because we have not only a quick attack unit in order to mitigate the loss, but—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Premier. I need you to wrap up, please.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Okay. We have actually an active forest management system in harvesting. Old forests are not being allowed just to rot and become fire traps.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That is our time.

Premier Higgs, thank you very much.

We will suspend for a few minutes to bring in our next witness.

**Hon. Blaine Higgs:** Thanks, everyone.

• (1125) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1130)

**The Chair:** We're back.

Premier Smith, welcome to OGGO.

The floor is yours for five minutes, please.

**Hon. Danielle Smith (Premier of Alberta, Government of Alberta):** Thank you so much.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the committee, especially knowing that it's a constituency week. Thank you for taking the time from that; I know how important that is to you.

I'm here on behalf of Albertans and Canadians who are struggling with severe financial pressures. They are increasingly desperate because they're facing a cost-of-living crisis not seen in decades. Over the last two years, inflation and high interest rates have driven up prices on everything from food to gas to housing—things that Albertans rely on every single day.

Families are being forced to make tough choices just to put food on the table. Businesses are having to make sacrifices to keep the lights on, and social services are under intense strain as more of our people reach out for help, many for the first time in their lives. Albertans and all Canadians need common sense, compassion and responsible government to prevail.

That's why I'm urging you today to heed the calls of Canadians across the country and suspend the increase in the carbon tax on April 1. The carbon tax has contributed to and worsened Canadians' stress and financial pain. Despite the federal government's claims that Canadians benefit from rebates, the carbon tax, on a net basis, will cost Albertans more than \$900 this year if it is implemented.

The federal government's own Parliamentary Budget Officer has also said that the cost to each Albertan will more than triple in the next six years to a staggering expense of \$2,700 net by 2030-31. This isn't just reckless; it's immoral and inhumane. The added pressure will ruin countless lives, futures and dreams. It is a weight that Canadians can't bear. That's why, since 2019, Alberta has been calling on the federal government to eliminate the carbon tax.

Let me repeat what I've said many times before: We understand the importance of achieving carbon neutrality and we can manage it together as a nation without punishing everyday Albertans. We've demonstrated as much in Alberta, where we are making significant strides towards reducing emissions. We're doing that without compromising jobs and hurting the industries that have created so much wealth and prosperity for our country and that will continue to do so if the federal government will just let them.

Our province has a long history of climate action, with more than two decades of programs and policies that have led emissions reductions and inspired other jurisdictions to follow our lead. Provinces and territories must be able to create emissions reduction plans that reflect their distinct needs and priorities. Alberta's industries are steadily lowering emissions with new technology and investment even as they compete with foreign suppliers who ignore the need in order to improve their own performance. Things don't have to be this way. We can effectively reduce emissions without punishing Canadians for trying to stay warm or drive to work or school or a medical appointment. Alberta is already doing it through our carbon trading market. It's the technology, innovation and emissions reduction regulation just launched actually on NGX this month and through our emissions reduction and energy development plan, which I released last April.

The only thing the federal carbon tax is achieving is higher costs. In fact Minister of Environment Stephen Guilbeault said it would take until 2060 for it to have an impact. As of April 1, Albertans will pay around 35¢ in federal taxes for every litre of fuel, along with the carbon tax, which also includes the federal excise tax and the GST, which is a tax on tax. The price of natural gas, which Albertans rely on, will also be affected by the carbon tax increase. The carbon tax increase on natural gas is going up to \$4.09 a gigajoule, which is more than double the base price of natural gas, which today stands at about \$1.72 a gigajoule.

The so-called solution of the federal government is to increase the carbon tax on something that is life or death for Albertans in the extreme cold of winter. I will say again that it is inhumane. It begs the question: How far will the federal government go to make life even more difficult and expensive when so many Canadians are already struggling.

Alberta municipalities, schools, and health care providers are telling us that they need to make cuts and borrow from elsewhere in their budgets just to accommodate the upcoming carbon tax increase, yet we hear repeatedly that affordability remains a top federal priority.

I'm calling on the federal government to match words with actions. This means working with the provinces to ease Canadians' burdens and strengthen the Canadian economy. Serious challenges, like affordability and emissions, demand serious responses, and an increased federal carbon tax is nothing of the sort. Canadians don't want it. You only need to look across the country to see premiers across party lines—seven of us—and the people they represent standing up against it.

If the federal government wants to protect Canadians' quality of life, it should step up and cancel the carbon tax increase immediately. At the very least the federal government should apply policy equally across the country. We've heard the Quebec representatives say several times that Quebec does not pay the fuel tax, and we would also like to see an exemption on all forms of home heating, not just ones that are centred in Atlantic Canada and on a particular type of fuel.

• (1135)

You must do this for the sake of fairness for all Canadians. The people of this country deserve nothing less.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to take questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Premier Smith.

We'll start with Mr. Hallan. Before we do, though, just to keep on time and respect the premier's time, we're going to stay exact on our timing. I will cut off right at the six- and five-minute marks, so please watch your time.

Mr. Hallan, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you, Chair.

I'll just start off by saying that I feel it's very shameful for the finance committee chair, Peter Fonseca, to go into hiding as soon as the premiers came calling to have a meeting at their request.

Premier, thank you for being here and thank you for joining 70% of Canadians and six other premiers, including a Liberal premier, in telling the Liberal-NDP government to spike the hike on the road to axing the tax by a common-sense Conservative government.

The PBO once again reconfirmed that families are at a net loss on average because of this carbon tax scam. For example, in Alberta a family will pay \$2,900 into this carbon tax scam. The finance minister herself was bragging that Alberta families get \$1,800 in rebates and that somehow Albertans should be grateful for this.

Premier, can you please tell Canadians the human toll this carbon tax scam takes on Albertan families so that the Liberals can understand the real pain it causes?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I can tell you a couple of things.

The way I think most Albertans look at it is that the government is taking a dollar and promising to give back 75¢. Everybody knows that's not a good deal. We've seen in the polling that people don't support the increase. They don't support the tax.

I can tell you that an MNP report from October 2023 showed that 51% of Canadians are \$200 or less away from being unable to meet their financial obligations. We also find that 51% of people in Alberta say that their level of debt is concerning to them, and 71% say that they are worried about their ability to repay their debts.

We took a number of affordability measures in order to be able to offset these costs over the last number of years. Those represented forgone revenue of \$7 billion. I'd be happy to itemize that if the member would like to ask me about it. We are now at a point where we have to run a balanced budget as well, and we're just asking for the federal government to recognize that it's their turn to do their part to ease the affordability crisis.

• (1140)

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you, Premier.

As you mentioned, in Atlantic Canada, when Liberal MPs were revolting because their poll numbers were tanking, Atlantic Canada got a carve-out. Alberta got no such carve-out, nor did the rest of Canada. Do you feel this is just another blatant attack on Alberta?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Look, I know the question about the Supreme Court decision on the carbon tax has been raised. I believe the Supreme Court decided in favour of the government on that because they were making the argument that it was such an important national issue that it needed to be dealt with in a national way and the rules needed to apply equally across the country. However, we heard the Quebec member say that they don't pay a carbon tax. We have heard as well that in Atlantic Canada the most polluting home-heating fuel in fact, which is home-heating oil, now has a reprieve for three years. Meanwhile, many of the provinces in the west made the decision years ago to switch to cleaner-burning natural gas, and we're getting punished for it.

I would just appeal to this committee that, if you want to apply the carbon tax, it has to be applied equally across the country in all provinces for all types of fuel. If you're not going to apply it in that way, then you need to give a reprieve across the country so everybody is treated fairly. I think it's creating a national unity crisis. I do believe it's the obligation of the members around this table representing all parties to ensure fairness in the way each citizen is treated in the country. They have a mandate to do so.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Chair, I'm just going to raise a point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Naqvi.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** My sincere apologies to the premier. I don't want to be disrespectful.

I see that Mr. Hallan has a prop on his computer. Yesterday you deemed that to be a prop, so if he would not display that while he's on the screen, I'd appreciate it.

**The Chair:** Sure. I can't see from the angle I'm at.

Oh, yes. Mr. Naqvi has a point. If you wouldn't mind...

Thank you, sir.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Too bad the Liberals are triggered by a sticker once again.

Premier, when you talk about a national unity crisis, I think of Steven Guilbeault, who, as far as I know, is the only minister who has been in handcuffs and an orange jumpsuit.

Can you please speak a little bit about how dangerous his ideology is, when it comes to our clean, responsible, low-carbon energy sector, for Alberta's and Canada's prosperity?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I should make sure that the committee knows exactly why Steven Guilbeault faced law problems. One was for the stunt he pulled on the CN Tower. The other was that he climbed on the roof of our premier Ralph Klein's house when his wife, Colleen, was home, terrifying her.

You can imagine how Albertans feel about how this is the person now responsible for enacting emissions policy. I would say that we've been able to work constructively with the federal government on a number of areas. It has worked with us on establishing a net-zero petrochemical plant with the Dow Chemical Company and a net-zero hydrogen plant with Air Products. We're in the process of getting to the final finish line on a net-zero cement plant with Heidelberg. It's worked with us on De Havilland to make sure that we have water bombers being built, not only in our province but also to help the rest of the country.

I don't want to say that it's uniformly negative, but the spirit of co-operative federalism means that you do not take unilateral action in an area of provincial jurisdiction. It means that you work collaboratively. I think the court has chastised the federal government, led in this area by Steven Guilbeault, on two occasions: the Impact Assessment Act and the plastics ban.

The approach that I would like to see the government take is to work collaboratively with us the way it has, not come through with a cap on a particular industry—oil and gas emissions, which it has announced—or a cap on methane, which it has announced, which will disproportionately impact our province. Its proposal for a net-

zero power grid, outside the Constitution under section 92, clearly demonstrates that it doesn't understand how our electricity market works. Net-zero vehicles, having 20% of vehicles sold by 2026.... We know that will simply kill our auto sector and reduce our ability—

**The Chair:** Premier, I apologize. I have to ask you to wrap up.

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Those are just some examples.

That's not to mention that the minister doesn't seem to want to build roads. It's like he hasn't ever left downtown Montreal. It's a big country.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Premier.

Thank you, Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Sousa, you have six minutes.

● (1145)

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Premier, I appreciate your being here. I apologize for those earlier points of order. As you can appreciate, a Conservative chair brought you here without the consultation of this committee to talk about the main estimates, but now we're talking about something else completely different, which is meant for the finance committee.

Yesterday, we put forward a motion, the last motion, which the Conservative chair did not allow us to pass. He adjourned, which made it very clear what the will of the committee was, notwithstanding the misinterpretation of an earlier motion.

I want to preface that by saying to you that we appreciate your being here, but we also recognize the politics involved and the partisanship that's taking place.

Can you advise us on when you were contacted to appear before this committee?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** We wrote a letter on March 26, asking to appear before the finance committee.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** No, I'm talking about the OGGO committee. When were you approached to appear at OGGO?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** After we had written our letter, we were approached on the same day, March 26, to appear before the committee.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Thank you for that.

Another item is the notion of reducing emissions in Canada and reducing emissions across all provinces, trying to make Canada competitive. You reaffirmed very eloquently that initiatives that are being taken, not just in the province of Alberta but everywhere, with respect to trying to be innovative, to have a green economy, to do things concurrently.... We are still a big oil and gas country. We still net a lot of revenue and recognize the importance of that export. We also recognize the importance of making it cleaner where possible to get it through. Those are important initiatives. I worked out in Calgary for many years in the early 1980s, as did many of those from out east. I appreciate the industry. However, for our kids' sakes, for your sake, for all of our sakes, we want to make Canada even better, notwithstanding.

In Ontario, where I had the privilege of being for some years the minister of finance, we also brought in the cap-and-trade system, similar to Quebec—we were part of the Western Climate Initiative—to be exempt from the federal alternative, to be competitive and to reinvest, dollar for dollar, in innovative industries while being competitive.

We have cement plants. We have a lot of things. As for you in Alberta, you do trade. You talked about some of the credits that you take advantage of. Ontario was netting \$1.5 billion or so in net earnings to be reinvested. Then a Conservative government came in and did away with that to pick a fight with Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister, on the carbon tax, when it was unnecessary.

Here we have an opportunity to do things. I need to understand the incentive now that Alberta has been taking to innovate and bring forward all of these great reductions to emissions. Why are you doing that?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** We showed leadership back in 2007 by setting the first price on carbon, I believe, in North America. We've continued with our industrial carbon pricing ever since. It's been re-named the technology innovation and emissions reduction regulation. The way it works is that industry is expected to be able to meet a certain standard. If they are above that standard, they pay into the fund. Then we use the fund to be able to reduce emissions elsewhere.

Since 2009, we have seen over \$2 billion invested through Emissions Reduction Alberta.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Those are fantastic. Why not expand it further? Why did you not take it a step further? Because we all recognize the importance of pricing carbon.... Do you believe pollution should be free?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** We have taken it further. We have asked for a recognition from ECCC to be able to acknowledge our TIER program as being equivalent, and they did until 2030.

Part of the way we did that is that we matched our increases with the federal increases, so by 2030 it will go up to \$170 on industrial emissions. We're talking today about retail emissions. I look at those as being two totally different things—

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** I understand. Yes. I appreciate that and—

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I'm sorry, MP Sousa. I also want to say we expanded it to include more. We included anyone under 2,000.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** I have about a minute left, so—

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** My apologies....

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** No, I appreciate what you're saying. We do offer rebates as a result of the consumer spending so that they get more than they receive. About eight out of 10 families get that benefit.

On another note, in Ontario, we also are looking at providing an Ontario pension plan to supplement the Canada pension plan, to add to it. The whole intent was to enhance CPP to make it even stronger. It's also a matter of unity. It's a matter of protecting all Canadians.

You spoke at the start about Albertans and Canadians for the nation's benefit. Can you explain what benefit there is to Albertans from withdrawing from CPP, creating more costs and putting at risk their retirement?

• (1150)

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** There is a formula in the act that was insisted upon by Ontario, so that if Ontario ever wanted to get out of the Canada pension plan, there would be clear rules for how to do that. We applied that methodology and found that, every year, Albertans pay more in premiums than they get back in benefits. With that invested over time, it has grown to about \$334 billion that we would be entitled to based on the formula in the act.

I think it's important for all Albertans to know and also all Canadians to know just how unbalanced Confederation is and just how much Alberta pays into Confederation.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** I understand.

When Ontario was a so-called have-not province, it still provided \$11 billion more to the rest of the federation than it received, whereas other provinces...and that has happened with Alberta. It is a national unity issue. It's about protecting Canadians. It's also about protecting Albertans for their future retirement.

Before I let you go, can you document the times you were called upon to come to this committee so that we can have that report back as well?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Certainly. It was just the one time and we said yes immediately.

**The Chair:** Thanks. That is our time.

We have Mr. Savard-Tremblay for six.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Premier. Thank you for your presentation.

Federal spending tends to be synonymous with federal interference or encroachment.

Not long ago, you passed legislation on Alberta's sovereignty. As you might imagine, I'm rather sympathetic to the idea, being a member of the Bloc Québécois and someone who fights for my nation's full independence.

I'd like to know your reasons for bringing forward the legislation. Did it have to do with federal spending? What caused you to do that? What was at the root of it all? Was it a failure to respect the Constitution? What kind of interference made you want to bring in the legislation?

[English]

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Mostly, it's been the various legal actions that we've had to take against the federal government. We've had a victory on the Impact Assessment Act, which you know as Bill C-69. We had a success initially on the declaration of plastics being toxic also being deemed to be unconstitutional, but I can tell you that my justice department is very busy. We have about 14 different actions that we are going to be taking against the federal government for the various ways in which it's interfering with our jurisdiction.

If you read the Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act—so I don't share your aspiration on separation—we just believe that the Constitution should be abided by, and that the Constitution was written in a way that gives sovereign powers to the provincial levels of government and sovereign powers to the federal level of government. It talks about the need for co-operative federalism: that the federal government cannot interfere in an area of provincial jurisdiction unilaterally. I think that's being borne out with some of the court decisions the federal government has now lost.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** All right. Thank you.

I'm well aware that we do not quite share the same aspirations. Although Quebec is not a signatory to the Constitution, we would still like it to be upheld. That would probably be best, though that doesn't take anything away from our fundamental option. We'd like it to be upheld and, at the very least, for there to be no intrusions that run counter to the Constitution.

On federal spending, there have often been questions related to new programs. In recent budgets, we've seen a raft of new taxes and levies that don't go to the intended areas of jurisdiction. We've also witnessed the creation of programs that, without being outright intrusions, will often establish the spider's web that could lead to future intrusions. Is that a concern for you?

• (1155)

[English]

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Certainly.

In one way, we've been inspired by Quebec, by your premier, in some of the policies he has established to establish guardrails around provincial jurisdiction. In particular, one of the things we like to emulate is that if there is an area of federal encroachment using the spending power, we've observed that Quebec has particular

success at being able to opt out and receive the full compensation. That is a strategy we have started to employ, and we'll continue to do that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** If I may ask the question, beyond respecting current jurisdictions, would you like to acquire more powers for Alberta, and if so, which ones?

[English]

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** We would certainly like for our full area of constitutional jurisdiction to be respected. I recognize that the federal government is responsible for the military, for international trade agreements, for international agreements, even like those signed at the COP meetings, for passports, for immigration and for currency. There are some areas that are concurrent that we would like to be able to collaborate on—like immigration—but I don't have any interest in encroaching on any of those areas.

In fact, if I tried to set up my own currency or establish my own passport office, then people would say, "That's crazy—that's federal jurisdiction." I think people should say exactly the same thing when the federal government encroaches on our jurisdiction. They should say, "You can't do that—the Constitution doesn't allow it." Unfortunately, it doesn't appear that it works both ways, and we're trying to assert that it should.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** That said, Ms. Smith, I can tell you that, if you were in charge of passports, you certainly couldn't do a worse job than Ottawa's been doing for a while now.

That being said, my takeaway is that you seem to look to Quebec as a model. I know that, at one time, a group of prominent westerners, specifically Albertans—including Stephen Harper—had written a letter saying that they wanted Alberta to be like Quebec, with powers similar to Quebec's. Ultimately, Quebec is something of an inspiration to you.

[English]

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** It is. Let me give a recent example. I noticed that your premier asked to be able to choose 100% of the newcomers coming to his province through the provincial nominee program. I would like that same aspiration. We have been home to 57,000 evacuees from Ukraine. Many of them are using our provincial nominee program, and instead of increasing the number of provincial nominees we've asked for to 20,000, the federal government reduced them.

I think that's a violation, quite frankly, of section 95 of the Constitution, which gives us concurrent jurisdiction, and we'll be pressing that. Perhaps Quebec would like to work with us on that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That is our time.

Mr. Bachrach, go ahead, please.

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

Thank you, Premier Smith, for being with us.

Maybe I'll pick up where my Bloc colleague just left off.

You mentioned that Quebec is an inspiration to Alberta. Quebec has taken a different approach to this whole issue of carbon pricing. It's the only province in Canada to be part of the cap and trade or carbon market, with, I believe, California and Washington. Is that something that Alberta has looked to participate in as an alternative to the federal backstop?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Well, I think we have our own program. If I understand the Quebec program, there are 172 industrial outfits that operate under their cap and trade system. I believe that actually ours is more expansive. I'm not sure of the total number, but we did have large emitters that were under the program. We recently reduced the threshold so that anyone who emits, I believe, more than 2,000 megatonnes a year can also participate in our emissions reduction program. If they are able to do better than the average in their industry, then they will generate credits. Those credits can then be sold, so that they can turn it into a revenue stream.

Yes, we've modelled our industrial program similarly to Quebec's. At the moment, it is just internal to trade within Alberta, but it has been advocated to me that we should be looking at ways of expanding it.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** For instance, if you participated in the same carbon market as Quebec, then this whole issue of the carbon tax wouldn't be an issue for Albertans. It's not an issue for Quebecers, because they're part of a different system that they've signed up for.

Are you currently looking at whether to participate in that same system?

• (1200)

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** No, we won't participate in that system, because quite frankly we transfer enough money to Ottawa that then gets spent in equalization to Quebec, so we're not looking for another way of transferring dollars out of Alberta to Quebec.

We are interested in finding ways of generating our own offsets through our investments in Dow chemical and petrochemical, which is net zero; Air Products hydrogen, which is net zero; and Heidelberg, which is net-zero cement. We also are keen to work with the federal government on establishing an ammonia market, so that we will be able to reduce emissions internationally. Article 6 has been mentioned by previous premiers. If we could simply reduce China's reliance on coal by 20%, that would offset the emissions of all of Canada. We also have geothermal that we are investing in. We just launched our very first commercial hydrogen fuelling station, and we'll be building out our hydrogen infrastructure. We've partnered with the federal government on dual-fuel vehicles

for long haul. We've partnered with the federal government on hydrogen buses.

Those are the kinds of ways in which we want to generate our own credits that can be used to offset our emissions, so that we can get to net zero by 2050.

At some point, once that market is more developed, perhaps we would look at having those emissions credits traded more broadly, but at the moment we're keeping it as an internal market.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** You mentioned article 6 and this idea that we can get some sort of credits for our exports, even when those products are consumed in other jurisdictions.

Canada does export some clean products. However, we also export some products that aren't so clean, including thermal coal.

Should the impact of burning thermal coal in other jurisdictions also count against our domestic emissions?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** We don't export thermal coal, as I understand it. I think it's mostly British Columbia that does that.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I'm not saying Alberta; I'm saying Canada, because I believe that article 6 would apply on a national basis. Is that correct?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** There is actually the ability under section 2 of article 6 for a subnational government to negotiate those kinds of partnerships.

I can tell you how South Korea and Japan and India are looking at it. Since they do have a large coal fleet, they're looking at dual combustion. If we can apply either hydrogen or ammonia so it can be combusted at the same time, that will reduce the overall emissions profile. If there's a way for us to export those products and to then get joint credit, whether it's fifty-fifty or whether they take 80% and we take 20%, we think that's good for the planet. We think that would be the way for us to make the largest reduction in emissions globally.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** My question still stands: Should our exports of dirty products also be accounted for in the same way that our exports of clean products are?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** It's a global market, and it's a global problem. We have to reduce global emissions. The way I look at it is that if we can live up to the spirit of what we signed on to in COP28, which recognizes natural gas as a vitally important transition fuel, then we'll be able to reduce the overall global emissions profile.



I can tell you what countries like South Korea and Japan and others tell us. If they can't get those long-term supplies of things like LNG or ammonia, they're going to bring more unabated coal on stream, which will actually increase overall emissions.

In the spirit of looking at this as a global problem and understanding that there are interim measures that need to be taken, it seems to me that those are the kinds of things that we should be partnering on with our friends and allies.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** You mentioned COP28 and the Paris Agreement.

Do you support Canada's remaining in the Paris Agreement?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Yes.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** The Paris Agreement is focused predominantly on reducing domestic emissions. You mentioned article 6, but at this point article 6 hasn't been used to provide credits for the export of energy products from our country. The largest part of the Paris Agreement is reducing domestic emissions. On that challenge, we have a plan, put forward by the government, that you take issue with. Have you tabled an alternative proposal, as the Prime Minister has suggested, that would contribute to meeting the requirements of the Paris Agreement?

**The Chair:** We have time for only a very brief answer. I apologize, Premier.

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Yes. My very first conversation with the Prime Minister was to tell him we were aligning with the 2050 target, as our allies were, and that I would produce an emissions-reduction and energy-development plan, which I did last April. We've been working on a number of tables with respect to how we will work on achieving some of those interim steps.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mrs. Goodridge, you have five minutes, please.

• (1205)

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Premier, for taking time here today to stand up for Albertans.

We've seen now the countries of Germany, Japan and, most recently, Greece come asking the Prime Minister about LNG. Unfortunately, his answer every single time seems to be that there's no business case. I don't think he's correct.

Can you give a bit of a snapshot as to what LNG would mean for our province?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I can tell you what it would mean for our country, what it would mean for our partner, British Columbia, as well, and what it would mean for our first nations, which are increasingly developing LNG export facilities. We've been very supportive of our indigenous communities being able to develop resources, take an equity stake, and be able to generate income.

For instance, we have a \$3-billion Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation. I see that British Columbia has also established a \$1-billion loan guarantee to allow nations to buy equity stakes in a variety of different projects. For instance, there's the 900-

megawatt Cascade power plant, which is indigenous owned. We have pipeline networks that are indigenous owned. I'm very much looking forward to seeing the impact that will have. It's going to deliver 1.2 billion dollars' worth of revenue to our nations in Alberta. I would encourage every province, as well as the national government, to do the same.

The value of natural gas right now is very low. It's \$1.72 per gigajoule, as I was mentioning, but it becomes the base fuel for so many products that can be used in the transition.

LNG and ammonia are the most stable ways to transport the hydrogen molecule, so being able to do both of those opens up new markets as well as reducing emissions. We developed our Alberta petrochemicals incentive program, whereby we give a 12% rebate for anyone who uses natural gas as a feedstock fuel. It's part of the reason that the Dow chemical company and Air Products have located in our industrial heartland.

I should also mention that when we did a survey of our pore space, we found that we have the best pore space in the world for carbon capture, utilization and storage, second only to Russia. That is part of the reason—because we have an at-scale project that was done by Shell Quest and an at-scale project for the Alberta Carbon Trunk Line—we're immediately able to capture those CO2 emissions. The pore space we have, I'm told by my officials, is so large that it could theoretically capture all of the emissions already produced by man so far.

We are very keen to make sure that natural gas, in the spirit of COP28, remains a transition fuel, so that we can not only help ourselves, our indigenous partners and the Canadian economy but also help our international partners.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Thank you for that, Premier.

Speaking of natural gas, we did see this winter a carve-out for Atlantic Canadians on their home heating, but not for natural gas, which is how most of us here in Alberta heat our homes.

Do you think that's fair?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** It's not fair at all.

In fact, when you look at December, January, February and March, when we have the greatest need for natural gas.... I notice that there are members on the committee from Ontario. Ontario also relies on natural gas, principally for home heating. Most people would have been able to enjoy a break this winter, because natural gas is trading so low. However, when you layer on a carbon tax that is twice the amount that people are paying for their base fuel—and it's itemized on our home heating bills—we see it; we feel it. Since we know that home heating oil is about 1.25 times more intensive on CO2 emissions, seeing that anyone who is using home heating oil, with a higher emissions profile, is able to get a three-year break while we're suffering through the -35° winters that we often have is.... It's absolutely not fair.

I think that it is the obligation of members of Parliament to ensure that fairness in the application of federal policy applies to all products, in all regions, for all types of uses, and that's not happening.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** It's truly unfortunate how asymmetrical the approach from the federal government has been on so many of these issues.

The solution that the Prime Minister and his eco-activist minister brought forward was heat pumps.

As you know, I'm in Fort McMurray. Heat pumps don't work super well at -50°. In fact, they don't really work at -20°.

Do you think that heat pumps are a good solution for northern Alberta winters?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** They may work in some jurisdictions, but I can tell you that in Alberta, my understanding is that our insurance companies will not insure a home that has only a heat pump. It needs to have a secondary backup, because, as you described, in most places in the province it will routinely get below -30°. If pipes freeze, that causes a major insurance wreck. They're just not practical in the extremely cold climate that we have in Alberta.

• (1210)

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Thank you so much for your strong advocacy.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, go ahead.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much, Premier, for being here with us today and having this important conversation. Affordability is absolutely at the centre of everything that the federal government is doing, and I appreciate that you are part of that work.

I wanted to set the record straight right off the bat. The oil to heat pump affordability program is not just available to communities in the Atlantic provinces. That is a program that is available across Canada from coast to coast to coast, across all communities. As you rightly pointed out, Premier, home heating oil is often the most expensive but also the most polluting type of oil. Again, our federal government has extended that program to all communities across Canada, including in Alberta, and including in my home province of Ontario.

Premier, I also wanted to highlight the fact that, again, I appreciate how the chair has unilaterally called these meetings and invited you and others to testify here, because it is such an important meeting, but I just wanted to highlight the fact that it is interesting to me that out of the permanent Conservative members of this OGGO committee, none have shown up, other than the chair, to ask questions of the Premier of Alberta and the Premier of Saskatchewan, even though three of those permanent members are from Alberta and Saskatchewan. I wanted to highlight the irony of that as well, and it is unfortunate. Nonetheless, those who are here are really keen on talking about affordability and about climate change, which are top priorities for this government.

Premier, I am very concerned about the fact that you're here to talk about and raise your concerns about the carbon pricing, which will add 3¢ per litre on gas on April 1, yet, at the same time, on April 1, Premier, you are raising the gas tax in your home province to 13¢, increasing it by 4¢.

I understand that you were at an axe the tax rally yesterday, I believe, with the Leader of the Opposition. Can you clarify for me whether you were protesting? Was it a rally to axe your tax on the gas tax, which is adding 4¢ to a litre? If you can just clarify that for me, whether you were at a rally to axe the tax that you are increasing in your province by 4¢....

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Sure. I'm happy to answer that.

I should let you know that there are 12,000 Albertans who have home heating oil, of our nearly five million population, so I think just by those numbers you can see that your program does not apply equally across the country. I would say as well that, as I mentioned, we have had \$7 billion of forgone revenues, because we've been trying to compensate for the inflation crisis at the federal level. In fact, we—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Premier, I'm sorry. My time is limited here, but are you speaking out against your government's 4¢ increase on the gas tax on April 1? I'm just curious. Will the government listen to your concerns?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Well, the federal government charges 35¢ in gasoline taxes. We charge 13¢. Our 13¢ goes to build roads. If your environment minister would let you build roads, maybe some of yours would go to build roads as well.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** We do: thousands of them every year. We do.

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Well, he certainly doesn't seem to want to anymore, and the 17¢, as we know, will not go to build roads. [English]

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Premier, I appreciate your not wanting to answer my question on that very sensitive issue of your raising the gas tax by 4¢ in your province, especially in a period right now where there's really an affordability crisis, but I am very worried about the fact, Premier, that last year you had 2.2 million hectares of land burned in Alberta, and you had 299 days of smoke days in the city of Edmonton—both records, absolute records. Can you tell us whether climate change caused these wildfires and these smoke days, yes or no?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I would say that 60% of the fires were caused by human activity, so we're doing a public campaign to make sure that people are safer. We also have—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I thought you would say that, Premier, because I looked at a report from your own Ministry of Forestry and Parks, which stated that there were 1,121 wildfires last year. Of those, 91 were caused by arson, and that includes 262 acres out of the 2.2 million acres that were burned.

It's only 0.1% of land that was burned that was caused by human activity.... Can you speak about the vast majority that was caused, again, by drought conditions and the heat conditions in your province? Furthermore, the most important question, Madam Premier, is, what are you doing to fight climate change, the forest fires and the drought in your community that are devastating land in your community and communities?

• (1215)

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Let me correct you. Sixty per cent—

**The Chair:** Premier Smith, I apologize, but Mr. Kusmierczyk has used up his time. You can respond in writing, because I understand that we do have to get you out by a certain time.

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Sure.

**The Chair:** I apologize.

Ms. Vignola, welcome back. Go ahead for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

Thank you for appearing before the committee, Ms. Smith. My fellow member asked you about your desire for autonomy and sovereignty. We don't share quite the same view on that, but that's the way it is.

Under the current budget, \$250 billion was transferred to Quebec and the Canadian provinces, including transfers to governments, pension benefits and benefits for families.

That's a significant amount of money. Significant though it may be, it clearly falls short of the health transfer Quebec and the Canadian provinces were calling for. As I recall, you also called on the federal government to increase the health transfer to 35% of health costs. How has the federal government's refusal to do that affected Alberta's finances?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** The way the program was initially drafted, it was supposed to be an equal cost-sharing program. I think over time it developed to a 65%-35% cost-sharing program, and all the premiers advocated for the federal government to live up to that spirit. It didn't, but we have to make sure we're providing health care regardless of whether or not the federal government wants to be a partner. We're in the process of doing major hiring of family doctors and nurse practitioners so we can shore up our primary care system. We're working on getting patients who require various levels of care into appropriate facilities for continuing care, addictions treatment and mental health treatment, and we're going to be expanding our surgical capacity. Those are things we're going to do regardless of whether or not the federal government wants to be an equal partner.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I conclude from what you're saying that the burden on Alberta's finances is steadily increasing, given ever greater needs. Have I understood you correctly?

[English]

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I think it's the case for every province. I believe that when we first started being concerned about the costs of health care, it was consuming 20% of our budget. Now it represents over 40%, and we still have the pressure of the baby boom population, which is going to add not only surgical costs but also long-term care costs, plus we're in the middle of a mental health and addictions crisis. The pressures are going to continue.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Indeed. You were speaking—

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm afraid that's our time.

Mr. Bachrach, go ahead, please, for two and a half minutes.

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

Premier, previously you mentioned the government's decision to create a carve-out for Canadians who heat with home heating oil. You mentioned the inequity of the way in which that was approached, and I think there's some agreement there. Our proposal was somewhat different—to give Canadians a break by taking the GST off all forms of home heating. Is that an approach that you would support, given that it would create equity and would actually result in more savings for people right across the country, regardless of how they heat?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I think that's a great idea, because then it would also remove the problem of the tax on tax that we have on both home heating costs and on the price at the pumps. I think that would be a reasonable compromise.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Why do you think the government, instead of doing that, chose the approach they did?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I think they want to take credit for transferring back 75¢ on the dollar, and they think people aren't going to notice that they took the dollar in the first place. I question the approach. I wonder what the Liberal members think is going to happen with those dollars. When they come back with \$400, do they think someone is going to go out and buy a \$60,000 electric vehicle? Do they think they're going to put \$10,000 of solar panels on their roof? Do they think they're going to convert to geothermal, which costs \$20,000? If we want to make a real impact on the kinds of vehicles people drive and on the kinds of heating they use, substantially more investments than a token tax rebate are going to have to be made. I would rather see other programs that would stimulate those kinds of choices.

• (1220)

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** You mentioned the emissions plan you have tabled. Now, I assume this is a commitment to reduce absolute emissions in Alberta over time towards this goal of 2050. In that plan, have you done an analysis of the cost per tonne? As I understand it, you're relying heavily on technologies that are not only expensive but also haven't been proven at scale. Has there been an analysis of the cost per tonne relative to that of other approaches, like the pricing approach the federal government has taken?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I can tell you that we will have three net-zero major industrial operations within the next two years: Air Products' hydrogen, The Dow Chemical Company's petrochemical plant and Heidelberg cement. Let me add Inter Pipeline as well, because it's going to have an ammonia project.

We do have at-scale ability because our former premier, Ed Stelmach, invested over a billion dollars in building out Shell's Quest project so that we could firm up the technology. It has now stored 11.5 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, I believe, over in Saskatchewan—

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** The question was very specifically on the cost per tonne of those reductions. Is there an analysis that shows that using those approaches to reduce emissions on a cost-per-tonne basis is less expensive for Canadians than the approach that the federal government has taken?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I can tell you that when I hear the federal environment minister say that his approach won't work until 2060 and I've just given you four examples that will work within two years, it does seem to be that the outcome is what we should be

looking at. If we can get to a net-zero outcome, that should be the goal.

**The Chair:** Thanks. That is our time.

We'll have two last four-minute rounds.

Mr. Lawrence, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Thank you, Premier Smith, for being here today. We appreciate your time.

My question will focus on the carbon tax and productivity. Of course, Canada is, as the Governor of the Bank of Canada said, in a productivity crisis, and one shining exception is Alberta. The average GDP, for example, per hour is about \$50. In the energy sector in Alberta, it's \$500. My concern is that the carbon tax and other actions by this federal government are putting sand in the gears of our economy and slowing down our productivity when we can least afford it.

Would you share my concern?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I do share the concern. I can tell you that we have had to take a whole variety of measures in order to be able to assist our individuals so that households are able to manage through the inflation crisis that we're facing and have more dollars in their pockets in order for them to go out and buy the things that they need to, so that we can keep the economy rolling.

We have our fuel tax relief program, which I mentioned saved \$2.3 billion because we took it off for two entire years. We re-indexed AISH and income supports. We gave \$20 million to food banks. We've reduced the increase year over year in auto insurance. We've re-indexed our personal income tax. We've supported post-secondary students with a cap on tuition increases. We've supported wage growth in the social sector. We've given supplementary rental supports. We've created an affordable housing plan that will spend \$8 billion over the next three years. We've reduced electricity costs through rebates at a cost of \$500 per household or a billion dollars over the course of that, and we've given affordability payments of \$100 per month for six months to our lowest-income individuals at a cost of \$625 million.

All of these are to make sure that people have enough money in their pockets to be able to keep our economy going, because that lends itself to businesses being able to have the dollars they need so that they can make the investments they need to make so that they can improve productivity. It would be helpful if the federal government would stop making it so hard for people and would do something equivalent to put the same number of dollars in the pockets of consumers so that we could keep our economy going strong.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Thank you very much, Premier Smith.

To prove that Ontarians can, indeed, share with Albertans, I'm going to split the rest of my time with Mr. Hallan.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you, Mr. Lawrence.

Premier, thanks again for being here and for always standing up for Albertans.

I'm interested to know this: What are you hearing from our great Alberta ranchers, our farmers, our agri-food industry and producers about this carbon tax scam?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** I can tell you that they're very frustrated, because they're producing food not only for us but for the world. We know that we're not only in an energy security crisis but also in a food security crisis. If you talk to the grain growers, they'll tell you that they are already a net-negative business. Yes, they do have inputs, but they're reducing the amount of fertilizer they use and the inputs that they use. Their whole business model is capturing CO<sub>2</sub> into the food products for export.

When you talk to ranchers, it's the same approach. Ranchers do an amazing job of managing biodiversity in our landscapes. Our landscapes in Alberta were created by millions of bison roaming on the lands. That deep fescue captures the CO<sub>2</sub> not only in the blades of grass but also deep into the root system and in the microbes that are in the soil, increasing organic material. None of that seems to be understood—that in fact our food producers are providing a service to the planet, not only providing a secure supply of food but also addressing some of these environmental issues—so they're very frustrated that every time they use an input, they get walloped with the tax but don't get the credit for the biodiversity offsets they provide.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Naqvi, go ahead please, sir, for four minutes.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Thank you.

Premier, you were speaking about affordability issues in Alberta and across the country. On the other hand, you are raising your gas tax by 4.5¢. Does it come with a rebate for Albertans, very similar to how the price of pollution through the Canada carbon rebate will be giving \$2,160 to rural Albertan families?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** We eliminate it completely when the price goes above \$90, which we did for two years. We will eliminate it again when the price trends above \$80. I'd in fact love to see the federal government do the same thing, so that when gas prices are high, they take their tax off completely, as we do, and when they're low, they bring it back on—

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** I'm sorry, Premier. I have very limited time. The answer is that there will be no rebate for Albertan families for the increase they will see on April 1 by 4.5¢.

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Albertans will get it removed completely if gas prices remain high, and I'd love to see the federal government do the same.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** There is no rebate at the moment.

Thank you—

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** The federal government could always follow our approach and remove it completely.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Premier, earlier this year, you imposed a moratorium on all renewable energy projects in your province. Your decision impacted over \$33 billion in energy investment and over 24,000 jobs. Six months later, you released a plan that would permanently ban or limit the construction of renewable energy in over 75% of Alberta, citing a concern that renewable energy projects have an impact on—and I quote—“viewscapes”.

My question is this: Do oil rigs impact viewscapes, yes or no?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** The wind turbines are the size of the Calgary Tower or the CN Tower, whichever—

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** I'm asking about oil rigs, Premier. I'm asking about oil rigs. Yes or no, do they impact viewscapes?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** No. They're not the same size as the Calgary Tower.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Do coal mines impact viewscapes, yes or no?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** We only have four advanced coal projects in Alberta. Coal mining is actually more of a British Columbia issue.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Does the Grassy Mountain coal mine project on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains impact viewscapes, yes or no? I have very limited time, Premier.

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** That was a project from the 1950s, and it's currently not in operation.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** But does it impact viewscapes?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** It's currently going through a regulatory process.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Do you think that oil and coal mines have a lesser impact on viewscapes than solar panels would?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** As I said, it's the wind turbines that we're concerned about, because they're the size of the Calgary Tower. In some of these projects, there are 100 or 200 of them on a single site, and they also find themselves in migratory pathways. They have an impact on bird and bat populations—

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** So your—

**Hon. Danielle Smith:**—which is a concern to us.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Your restrictions will not impact solar panel projects, renewable projects, in the province of Alberta?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** The issue around solar is making sure that it doesn't take up arable land, prime agriculture land. We're spending a lot of money with the federal government on irrigation, and there are certain uses that are incompatible. You can't put pivots on a landscape that has acres and acres of solar panels, so we're asking for them to be moved to marginal landscapes.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** I'm having a hard time. If you're not going to allow renewable sources of energy to take place and create thousands of jobs and investment in Alberta, how are you proposing to reduce the emissions that you're claiming Alberta is doing when the evidence is to the contrary?

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Well, the reason we have so much solar and wind in our province is that we have a free market. You'll notice that there are many other jurisdictions that don't, so they don't have wind and solar. The reason wind and solar make sense in our province is that there's natural gas backup. You can talk to any solar or wind provider: They know we need natural gas.

Natural gas has a carbon tax on it. If you want to see more wind and solar, you should take the taxes off the peaker plants that are going to back them up.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Thank you, Premier.

Chair, I'm going to use my remaining time to move a motion, as follows:

That the committee invite the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) to appear in relation to the ongoing study of the Main Estimates.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Sure. How about if we release our witness and go to that motion?

Premier Smith, thank you very much.

**Hon. Danielle Smith:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it.

Thank you to the committee.

• (1230)

**The Chair:** Did you want to propose a certain date or anything, Mr. Naqvi?

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Yes, we should have them. You're so good in scheduling witnesses so urgently—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:**—that I have full faith in trusting you.

**The Chair:** On Good Friday, we'll be meeting with the IAFF.

We have a motion on the floor. Do we have a speaking list or are we fine to adopt that motion, colleagues?

Do you want to repeat it slowly so that our clerk can write it down?

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** I will, and I would suggest that they appear as soon as possible, Chair.

The motion reads:

That the committee invite the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) to appear in relation to the ongoing study of the Main Estimates.

**The Chair:** That would include “before the estimates are tabled.” How's that?

Next we have Ms. Atwin and then Mr. Bachrach.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm just looking for some clarity. I wasn't sure if you were joking or not about meeting on Good Friday. This week has been full of surprises and curveballs, so I wouldn't completely rule that out, but I'd really like to know, because I'd like to celebrate Easter with my family.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** That's a good one.

Mr. Bachrach, go ahead, and then it's Mr. Kusmierczyk and Mr. Lawrence.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I support the motion—

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

**The Chair:** Can you start again, please, Mr. Bachrach?

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I support the intention behind the motion and certainly support many of the goals of the International Association of Fire Fighters. I'm just curious, because our study of the estimates is now taking some twists and turns into areas that are not traditionally directly associated with the estimates. Perhaps the mover of the motion could provide a little background on the subject area so that we could prepare adequately for the meeting.

**The Chair:** We have Mr. Kusmierczyk and then Mr. Lawrence, and then we can get back to Mr. Naqvi if he wishes to respond.

Go ahead, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Thank you, Chair.

I would say that they should appear as soon as possible, but during a regular sitting of the committee when the House is in session and the House is sitting.

**The Chair:** That's fair.

Go ahead, Mr. Lawrence, and then we'll go back to Mr. Naqvi if he wishes to respond, and then it will be Mr. Bachrach and then Ms. Vignola.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to amend the motion by including the following: “Premier Furey, Premier Houston and Premier King”.

**The Chair:** That will be a subamendment.

I will take a speaking order on the subamendment.

Ms. Vignola, your hand is still up. Is that on the subamendment or the original amendment? Then it will be Ms. Atwin, who I assume will be speaking on the subamendment.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Actually, that can apply to the subamendment as well as the amendment.

With regard to the premiers attending, are we going to go around the 10 premiers of Quebec and the Canadian provinces and the three responsible for the territories? It's important to listen to them, I repeat, and I'm convinced that listening to them helps find consensus and get people thinking about potential solutions. That said, is this committee the right place? We study budgets, yes, but the premiers have their own tables at which to discuss matters directly with the government. If the Committee decides to hear from each of the country's premiers and that decision is made by a majority of its members, so be it, but I wonder if the Committee is really the right place.

With regard to firefighters, I would indeed be very curious to hear the rationale. I'm wondering if the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates isn't becoming a catch-all for holding meetings with people who should perhaps be turning to the Finance or Environment committees instead, which would be more in keeping with the committees' objectives. That said, while I may understand, I look forward to hearing the rationale and expansion.

• (1235)

[*English*]

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Ms. Atwin. We'll get to you, but there is a point of order.

**Mr. Philip Lawrence:** I'm hoping I will have the indulgence of the committee. I mentioned Premier Furey, Premier Houston and Premier King, but I omitted Premier Ford, whom I meant to include in the subamendment.

**The Chair:** Ms. Atwin, go ahead.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would echo a lot of the comments of Mrs. Vignola regarding rationale.

I'd also highlight that Premier Houston asked to appear at the finance committee, not at OGGO. Also, the other premiers have not asked to appear here, so I'm questioning why their names would be included in this.

I appreciate that we're actually seeing a motion for this and that we're being involved in the discussion and decision-making about this potential appearance. That is a nice and marked change from what we've been experiencing, but I'm going to need to know a bit more of the rationale around that as well.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I realize it's a tiny bit out of order, but we've had many requests for you to flesh out this motion, Mr. Naqvi.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** Do you want me to speak to the main motion?

**The Chair:** I think three of our members were asking you to flesh out the estimates, etc., so why don't we do that? Then we'll return to the subamendment.

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** We've now just spent two days talking about the price on pollution, about climate change and about the carbon tax. Chair, with all due respect, you unilaterally invited a few premiers to come and present here. However, I think it's important to hear from people who are directly involved in dealing with the impact of climate change.

Our firefighters are on the front lines. We have all heard from them about the impact of climate change, including floods and other circumstances they are seeing right now on the ground in pretty much every province across this country. They are the ones being called upon to help Canadians every single day.

If we have given an opportunity to three premiers to come and deny climate change and deny any action that should be taken to fight it, I think it's important that we also hear from people like firefighters to draw the complete picture of the impact of climate change on Canadians, as well as what they are seeing and what the impact is on them.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

We'll get back to the subamendment.

We'll start with Mr. Hallan.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank my honourable colleague Philip Lawrence for a very good subamendment that makes absolute sense and is very relevant. I'll address some of the comments that Ms. Atwin made as well.

I think it is important to have the other premiers here, as Mr. Naqvi said, to talk not just about climate change but also the negative impact that the carbon tax has on families in their provinces.

To address Ms. Atwin, this is being taken up in this committee because the finance committee chair went into hiding when the premiers came calling. It was the chair of this committee, our great colleague and member for Edmonton West and the West Edmonton Mall—

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. That is inaccurate.

The chair of the finance committee was clear—

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk, I accept what you're saying, but it's not a point of order. Thanks.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** —that he did not receive a request from the majority of the committee, so—

**The Chair:** Please continue, Mr. Hallan.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** I want to thank the great member for Edmonton West and the West Edmonton Mall for stepping up since the finance chair, Peter Fonseca, went into hiding when the premiers came calling. Following that, I think it is appropriate that we have the premiers come here and testify on the impact of failed environmental policies by this Liberal-NDP government, not just on firefighters, but also on residents in their provinces.

In the case of the premier that Mr. Lawrence put forward, he is a Liberal premier who said to spike the hike against this Liberal-NDP government, which is absolutely obsessed with this carbon tax and is making sure the costs of gas, groceries and home heating go up and is driving more people to food banks. We have seen two million people going to food banks in a single month and a million more are projected to. Can you believe that in Canada today there is a group of 10,000 Canadians in a Facebook group who are Dumpster diving because they can't afford food? All of these things are very relevant.

• (1240)

**Mr. Yasir Naqvi:** I have a point of order, Chair.

This is not a debate on the floor of the House of Commons. We've heard all of your talking points, thank you very much. Let's talk about this motion, Chair, and let's get to it.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Colleagues, just very quickly on this, I was mistakenly referring to the amendment offered by Mr. Lawrence as a subamendment. We are on the amendment to the original motion by Mr. Naqvi, just to be clear.

Go ahead, Ms. Atwin, please.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again it's the relevance of bringing in premiers to speak on an issue on which we want to pull in the expertise of the firefighters association. I think it's clear that the premiers are not experts on the main estimates. They're not necessarily experts on carbon pricing either. We heard a lot of rhetoric but no real tabled information. Again I would question the linkages in this conversation. We're supposed to be studying the main estimates. I would again highlight that those premiers did not request to appear before our committee. I think we should respect their time and the responsibility that they have to look after their own provinces, including mine at home here in New Brunswick. Again there was inaction in the legislature here in New Brunswick. Action was not taken to look at electricity price increases. Instead our premier was here to grandstand.

I think this is all a game and a circus and a farce at this point. I think Canadians deserve better than this, but at the very least, if we're going to open this Pandora's box, I'd like to hear from experts on climate change. Perhaps natural resource ministers would be a better fit. I'm not proposing an amendment but I would just like to put forward that this is increasingly making very little sense, and it's certainly wasting our time as a committee.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Mr. Bragdon, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** I just want to clear up something here. Any idea that premiers should not be addressing this committee—

or any committee, for that matter—on behalf of their constituents and on behalf of the people who live in the provinces.... Premiers are the first ministers of this country. They should be heard on any issue that we deem we want to hear from them on or that they would like to have input on. They asked to speak to the finance committee. That was not granted. When they were asked to speak here, they jumped at the opportunity to do that, because this is a top-of-mind issue for every Canadian.

I know at home here in New Brunswick it is top of mind, because every time New Brunswickers go to the grocery store, fill up their car, take their kids to a sporting event or go to work, they have to drive, and this tax is disproportionately affecting those of us who live in rural communities and small towns. Given the fact that premiers want to speak to this committee about this issue, I think it behooves this committee to make sure that every premier who wants to speak on this has the opportunity to do that. They are Canada's first ministers. We need to hear from them, and they should be heard. I think we should go ahead with this one.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Mrs. Goodridge, please go ahead.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Thank you, Chair.

I think it's absolutely relevant to be hearing from our premiers. Their budgets are being impacted substantially by this. They represent a very important space when it comes to how this is impacting Canadians from coast to coast to coast. We heard today very clearly from Premier Higgs and Premier Smith about how this is impacting families and causing families to make very difficult choices, and that is directly relevant to our supplementary estimates. This is absolutely critical information.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

I agree with Ms. Vignola that we should have the opportunity to hear from all the premiers across the country about the effects of the carbon tax on their economies and on families.

[*English*]

I think it's political grandstanding coming from the Liberals, who want to shut down hearing from premiers they don't like and who are being triggered by people who happen to be supportive of oil and gas. Frankly we have to stand up against this. I fully support hearing more on this.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Vignola, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much, Chair.

I dislike, and I mean heartily dislike, having words put in my mouth. I'm going to correct what was just said and I'm also going to correct what a member of the Liberal Party said.



First of all, when you provide information, you have to provide all of it. Yes, it's important to me that the premiers of Quebec and the Canadian provinces be heard, but they probably shouldn't be heard at the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. There's a federal-provincial table for that purpose, and Finances can be linked to that too. So the "but" is important: when you inform, you fully inform, and you don't hide half the information. Thank you very much.

Secondly, I followed the meeting on ParlVu and at no time did I hear any of the premiers present here today deny the consequences of climate upheaval, both on the economy and the environment. Let me be clear. We're told that we've heard people deny the consequences of climate change, and that we need to hear from others who will come and say that it exists. However, no premier here at this table has said that it doesn't exist or that it has no consequences.

The Premier of Alberta pointed out that there have indeed been human-caused fires, but she did not deny the consequences of climate change on the economy. When you provide information, I'd like you to provide information on the big picture. You can't claim that I'm a big fan of oil. Informing means giving all the information you receive, without hiding or misrepresenting any of it. It's important to remember that.

With regard to the premiers, I stand by my position that we must study the Main Estimates. I'm keenly aware that they have things to say and want to say them, that they want to be heard by the Prime Minister of Canada, but don't feel they are. That's where the solution lies. Is the Prime Minister of Canada at the table? The answer is no. There is a specific table for the Prime Minister of Canada and the premiers of the provinces and Quebec, and that is where they must discuss, find solutions together and study the issues in depth. That's what I said. I repeat, don't put words in my mouth. Let's not distort the information I've provided.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Vignola.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, please go ahead.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Over the last two weeks, the committee members here at OGGO were treated like doormats by you, the chair. We've raised that issue on a number of occasions where we weren't consulted. We weren't consulted on the meetings. We weren't consulted on the witnesses.

I've been on the OGGO committee for five years, and many of the members around this table have been here for five years. We do serious work here. We are worker bees around this table. We put our heads down, we do good work and we study issues of great importance to our residents and our constituents in Canada.

I am seeing right now that good work and that spirit being thrown away and the OGGO committee being turned into a soapbox for premiers, an election platform for premiers. As my honourable colleague mentioned, they have many platforms already that they can grandstand on. I really object to the fact that they want to turn what is a hard-working committee, a dedicated committee,

into their own personal grandstanding soapbox and election platform.

Do your campaigning somewhere else.

We had three premiers come before this committee. Each of those premiers has a wildfire crisis in their province, where millions of hectares of land have been burned, with billions of dollars in costs. We heard three premiers here: all talk, no action and no plan to fight and address the climate crisis. We heard the screaming hypocrisy of premiers coming here to decry a 3¢ increase on the price of a litre of gas because of the price on pollution, when, in their own provinces.... The Premier of New Brunswick is increasing hydro rates by 12%, and the Premier of Alberta is increasing the gas tax by 4¢, and not mentioning a word about that. They come here and say nothing about the fact that the Parliamentary Budget Officer clearly stated in the last meeting—it was clear as day—that four out of five families are better off with the price on pollution and the Canada carbon rebate.

No answers in terms of why the premiers, especially in the case of Alberta...a family of four in Alberta that receives about \$2,100 back on the Canada carbon rebate every year...and no mention about what that will do in terms of the affordability crisis that so many families are facing: There's nothing new that came from these conversations. Everything that was said was said in the newspapers and was said already by these premiers in the media, on television, in rallies. All it did was take time away from this committee to do the work that it's supposed to do, that it's designed to do, and, in this case, to study the main estimates and provide a report back to the House of Commons.

This is a complete taking over, a taking hostage of this committee and its important work. It raises this question as well: Each of these premiers, especially from Alberta, has a health care crisis on their hands. What the heck are they doing here in a two-hour committee meeting at OGGO, spewing the same lines they've said on every other platform in the media and newspapers, bringing absolutely nothing to this discussion? Isn't there a better use of their time?

Finally, if these meetings with the premiers were so important, why is it that the three Conservative permanent members of this committee were not present at any of the meetings and at the testimonies of the premiers, especially considering that we had two Conservative MPs, permanent members on this committee who are from Alberta, and one who is from Saskatchewan, and they wouldn't even bother...? They couldn't even be bothered to shake the sand off their sandals, grab a laptop and join us.

• (1250)

Everyone else was here, including my NDP colleague, who was downright ill but who made an effort to be here.

I want OGGO to get back to the way it was, focusing on good work, asking tough questions, doing research and having opportunities to prepare for our witnesses so we can ask the tough questions to hold people to account and we can provide recommendations for the government with respect to policies. That's the way we've done it for five years, but somehow, in the last number of months, this committee has been hijacked. Its members have been treated as doormats, and this committee is turning into nothing but a propaganda tool and a soapbox for somebody's campaigns. That is not the way it should be.

I ask the chair to listen to what the committee said in the last meeting when we passed the motion. Work with us. Collaborate with us. Let's get back to work. Let's put this childish grandstanding

aside and let's get back to the work that Canadians expect from all of us.

(Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 3)

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

• (1255)

**The Chair:** Today is Thursday. How about we say one week from tomorrow, Friday, at noon, for everyone to send the names of their witnesses to the clerk? Then we'll figure out when the witnesses are available and proceed from there.

Colleagues, thank you very much. If there's nothing else, we're adjourned.

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