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Chair: Ms. Valerie Bradford



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• (1605)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 115 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. All witnesses and participants have completed the required connection texts in advance of the meeting. Both of our witnesses are online today, as are several committee members.

I'd like to remind all members of the following points: Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak, whether participating in person or via Zoom. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute it when you're not speaking. For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French.

Thank you all for your co-operation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(i) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, October 31, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of the impact of the criteria for awarding federal funding on research excellence in Canada.

This is basically a rerun or a continuation of the meeting we attempted to have on Tuesday, which had to be aborted due to technical difficulties with our audio. I'm very glad that two of our witnesses were able to come back again.

We're going to do a restart for continuity. We have many new committee members present today who didn't hear anything before, so I think it's good that we have a fresh start.

It's now my pleasure to welcome Dr. Philip Kitcher, John Dewey professor emeritus of philosophy, as an individual, and Dr. John Robson, executive director of the Climate Discussion Nexus. Both are joining us by video conference.

Up to five minutes will be given for your opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Dr. Kitcher, I invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Mr. Philip Kitcher (John Dewey Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, As an Individual): I'm most grateful for the invitation to speak to you. In light of Tuesday's partial meeting, I now feel that I have a much better understanding of the issues with which you're concerned.

Thirty years ago, I was invited by the Library of Congress of the United States to write a report on the promise and the potential problems that would result from the human genome project. That led me to write a book in which I explored some of the ethical, legal and social implications of that project.

In the decades since, a significant part of my research has attempted to provide an account of how scientific research should bear on policies within a democratic society.

The first thing I want to say today is that public funding of scientific research is essential to a healthy use of scientific technology. Nations that cannot support their own research are dependent on efforts made in other places. Frequently they find themselves unable to acquire solutions for their own special problems. To cite one notorious example, African children suffered for a long while from river blindness because their countries could not manufacture or purchase the pertinent drugs. The foreign companies that designed those drugs found it more profitable to manufacture cosmetics for rich members of their societies.

There are two obvious consequences of abandoning public funding, and they're disastrous. The first is the emigration of the most successful native researchers. The second is the privatization of research, with the predictable result that the research done will be tailored to the needs of the wealthy. That tends to be where the profits are.

I'll add something to the text I sent—namely, that I don't think it is wise to have only private companies and private ventures involved in the development of AI.

In a democratic society, research should attempt to meet the most urgent needs of the citizenry, all the citizens. Most nations have contained populations whose needs have previously been ignored. If, when that's recognized, it appears that too much emphasis is placed on a previously neglected group, a new balance may need to be struck, but the original decision to address the needs of that group was a properly ethical choice. It shouldn't be dismissed as ideology.

Researchers should not quit the public research sphere in fits of pique. Rather, they should work with those who make funding policy, explaining the corrections they envisage. There has to be a dialogue involving researchers and representatives of the most urgent needs of all the population. Working out the proper relationship between the perspectives of the research community and the hopes of those who are currently experiencing difficulties is a complex business. It requires a painstaking process of ethical inquiry.

Much of my work during the past 30 years has attempted to develop a model for how that inquiry might go, and I'll be delighted to say more about that today, because I think that is the real, deep and difficult problem.

Thank you.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much for those opening remarks.

Now we will turn to Dr. Robson.

I invite you to make your opening statement of up to five minutes. I'm sure it will go much more smoothly today.

Dr. John Robson (Executive Director, Climate Discussion Nexus, As an Individual): Well, that wouldn't be a hard bar to clear, but I thank you very much for inviting me and indeed for inviting me back to present a perspective that is perhaps different from that of the previous witness.

You're gathered here to ponder the impact of the criteria for awarding federal funding on research excellence in Canada, and I'm here to urge you to get rid of them, and also all of the funding involved, rather than refining the criteria.

I say this for two reasons.

The first is that you, as members of Parliament, are the critical link between citizens and the whole political process. In the massive apparatus of government, you are the only people we choose, and you have core duties that you must attend to, which, at the moment—not to be uncivil—are being carried out very badly. You need to be peering into the public accounts, not the test tubes.

The second point—and those of you who were here for the first try will know this—is related to the fact that I come from an academic family. Both of my parents are professors, as well as my uncle and two cousins. My grandfather was not just a professor; he was an expert on the evolution of Parliament. My quotation of the day online today, in fact, is from him.

Our universities are in a mess today, and one of the primary reasons is that they've become creatures of the state. Of course, it may be occurring to some of you that education is in fact constitutionally provincial, and you're right. Nevertheless, the federal government somehow seems to spend something on the order of \$15 billion a year on post-secondary education, and I don't think it's doing much good.

More to the point, when I speak of your core duties, the first one I want to mention is the national finances. Solvency is a critical thing, yet we are facing massive deficits. We just got this weird Christmas tax break that's apparently going to save each of us \$4.51

and cost firms millions to administer. I urge you to put aside genetic codes and look at the tax code.

An even greater responsibility is the defence of the realm. I'm just drawing here on very recent news stories. Canada is defenceless in the Arctic. We have no assets there worthy of the name. In fact, we are generally defenceless in an increasingly dangerous world.

Again, I tell you to forget about antimatter and get us some ammunition and somebody capable of firing it.

Another critical federal responsibility is infrastructure. A news story revealed that Via Rail is getting subsidies exceeding \$1,000 a passenger, but it can't make the trains run on time. Then some minister was promising, finally, a human right to clean drinking water for first nations and long-term sustainable funding for generations. What we really have is boil water advisories for generations. I say to forget heavy water and fix the tap water.

Then there was the story about the Federal Court maybe having to curtail hearings because they have such a funding shortfall. Nothing is more fundamental to peace, order and good government than justice—except defence—but justice is collapsing as well in this country. You could wait almost a year just to get a hearing on a traffic ticket. I assure you that's true. This is happening even though federal spending has ballooned from under \$300 billion a decade ago to over half a trillion today, the national debt is over a trillion dollars and the federal public service is up a baffling 40%.

You as MPs need to make this stuff stop. Never mind inventing a Canadian bilingual chatbot. I do think there's a certain irony in the fact that the hearings fell apart last time because we couldn't actually manage translation. Is there anything that the federal government ought to be more on top of than that?

You know, I would say more about the universities, but time is short. Bruce Parry and Heather Exner-Pirot both spoke about that. I want to come back to this point that you should leave education to the provinces. It's bad enough with them in charge.

When you cut, if you cut the spending—I'm talking about that \$15 billion, to end on a slightly more cheerful note—take about a billion dollars of it and buy yourself some staff. I worked on Capitol Hill almost 30 years ago and I discovered that the congressional U.S. House of Representatives' budget committee alone had about 100 staff. Representatives have close to 20 each. Senators have dozens; a lot of them are doing administrative or constituency work, but they have five or 10 full-time policy people to keep them on top of what's happening.

Here, you're looking at five staff in total. I'll tell you what: Cabinet, the party leaders and the bureaucracy do not want MPs on top of issues, because it makes you less docile. They want to distract you, and this issue today is a distraction. Laser beams? That's for cats to chase.

• (1615)

We citizens need legislators who are focused on fundamentals, not cold fusion, because right now, in the central responsibilities—

The Chair: Thank you. That's our time. I'm going to stop you there—

Dr. John Robson: Nobody's minding the store, and it shows.

The Chair: I'm sorry.

I need to caution you as well. We are still having some trouble with your sound today. I hear a little fuzziness. When you're answering questions, I'm going to have to ask you to speak a little more slowly just so your sound comes through.

Thank you both for your opening remarks.

Now we're going to open the floor to questions. Please be sure to indicate to whom your questions are directed.

We'll start that off, please, with MP Tochor for six minutes.

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): We're going to talk just on academia for a bit to start, and a bit about the current landscape in the States and then in Canada. It would be interesting to hear our witnesses' take on it.

Included in some of the associated costs that universities spend money on are the DEI programs. We see that American universities, such as the University of Michigan, have spent over a quarter of a billion dollars in the past few years. Of that cost, 56% was on salaries.

It got me thinking. How expensive is this project in Canada? Do either of the two witnesses want to take a stab at what that might be?

No.

It would be probably be in the millions, if not billions. This is while we have a crisis of every university and every group that comes in here representing students, professors or research asking for more money.

We have dollars that the taxpayers have provided Ottawa to provide studies—I'll open this up if either of you has comments—such as one at the University of Waterloo for \$37,524, called “From Furies to Sport Fans”. This is a study that was done at the University of Waterloo.

Do you have any comments on that spend?

Dr. John Robson: Yes. If I may, the thing is that it's not just the direct cost, large as it is, since universities, being creatures of the state, are hugely bureaucratic these days; it's the impact on education and morale.

At our universities, pro-Israel speakers are chased away by thugs, whereas people are invited in to spew anti-Semitism. There was a lounge just opened somewhere that's for non-whites only.

This kind of thing does not have just a monetary cost; it's hugely demoralizing.

There's another thing. The Bouchard report talks about this DEI and says how we must have this perspective and that perspective and so on. Jonathan Kay once said, “Ok so who wants to go up on the first Oral Tradition-powered rocket?” It forces people to make claims about the nature of knowledge that they know are false. That's deeply corrupting. That would not happen in private universities. To privatize universities is not to destroy higher education, but to reinvent it.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Thank you.

Along that vein—

Mr. Philip Kitcher: May I say something?

Mr. Corey Tochor: Yes, please.

Mr. Philip Kitcher: Thank you.

I think it's terribly easy to pick out one program that sounds as though it's incredibly fruity and start in on it. It's very easy to target something, as Senator Proxmire did for many years in the United States, that seems to be worthy of the Golden Fleece award, as he called it.

To be honest, what you should be looking at are the statistics as a whole. You should be looking at the track records of research programs in various universities. You should be looking at which of those seem to have led to profitable and useful things—not necessarily financially possible, but humanly possible—that have issued results that have made human lives better.

That's the sort of statistical basis you need. Please don't wave your hands in the direction of something that comes to you in a catchy phrase and think necessarily that's indicative of the whole thing.

With respect to DEI—

• (1620)

Mr. Corey Tochor: I'm just going to go on to the next question.

I'd like to explore a bit more of the things that Dr. Robson talked about that are happening on campus. We have heard testimony on the importance of diversity of viewpoints as opposed to conformity, which critics say is currently being pushed by universities.

Could you elaborate on the benefits of diversity of viewpoints and the ways in which modern universities harm them? The example that you highlighted is one of the areas that I believe is harming our society.

Dr. John Robson: This is my own story.

I've taught at four major North American universities. I've also worked for two of Canada's major think tanks. When I taught at the University of Calgary and I went to see the chairman at the end of my first year, I said, "I'd love to stay on. This is great. I think the students like me. I have good reviews," and so on. He said, "Oh, we wouldn't have hired you if we'd known you were conservative." I said that seemed a bit strange, and he said, "Oh, no. We just don't like ideology." I said, "With respect, sir, we're sitting in your office under a six-foot red square silk flag of Che Guevara." He said, "That's just decoration."

At the end, I also had a student tell me, "I'm a graduating senior in history, and in four years, you're the first professor I've ever heard criticize the Soviet Union." That was in Calgary. That was 30 years ago.

This is not a healthy environment. This is not a place where students are being exposed to a variety of viewpoints and are being challenged.

It's worse in the humanities than it is in the sciences, but it's getting into the sciences too. This is not—

Mr. Corey Tochor: I have to cut you off. I have one last question. If we run out of time, please submit a brief for both the last question and this one to fully explain your answers.

In terms of peer review, in your view, is having peer review currently fitting the purpose in our studies?

Dr. John Robson: It's totally broken. It's pal review.

The reviewers aren't paid. They don't go and look at the data. They just sort of go, "Yes, that sounds all right." Retraction Watch publishes, and then you get this endless retraction of peer-reviewed papers.

The system is busted through and through. As for the idea that it has to be public because a private system would be corrupted, the public system is deeply corrupted.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Thank you very much for your testimony today.

The Chair: Mr. Kitcher, you have time to chime in for a bit if you'd like. Do you have an answer on that? No?

You muted yourself. Maybe you could submit an answer in writing, then, so that we can move on. Thank you.

We will turn to MP Chen for six minutes, please.

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you again to the witnesses and for coming back for today's meeting.

I'll start off with Professor Kitcher.

You spoke about the dangers of the privatization of research. Could you tell us a bit more? Do you have any examples in which privatization of research is being tailored to the needs of wealthy or powerful corporations and does not necessarily support broad research for the greater public good?

Mr. Philip Kitcher: It's all over parts of the pharmaceutical industry. You only need to look very broadly at the kinds of drugs that are made, the kinds of drugs that are marketed and the ways in which, for example, drugs that are addictive were pushed. I'm thinking of things like the Sackler family.

There is a huge amount of stuff that doesn't get produced even though it would do good, because it turns out to be unprofitable. This is a terribly sad story.

I co-authored a study with a young student at Columbia early in the 21st century in which we took a hard look at the ways that the needs of people around the world were being met by big pharma. It has gotten much better than that in the years since, but there's still a lot wrong with it.

Privatization is driven by profit motives, and people who can't pay don't tend to get the drugs they need, even when those drugs have already been developed.

• (1625)

Mr. Shaun Chen: There has been a lot of conversation around pharmaceuticals and the insurance industry, given the recent events in the U.S. With respect to the example you just gave, would you say that more public funding is needed to support research that is not created in the interest of powerful corporations and for profit motives?

Mr. Philip Kitcher: Yes, I would say that. In my view, this is terribly important.

I must confess that while Dr. Robson comes from a family of academics, I come from a family of poorer people. I was a great beneficiary—and my mother before me was a great beneficiary—of the fact that various medicines were universally available in Britain to people who couldn't pay.

That is something that any serious ethical medical system should strive to replicate, and if the drug companies are making that impossible, then the drug companies should be regulated.

Mr. Shaun Chen: I'll turn to Dr. Robson.

You talked about universities acting as "creatures of the state". You have a doctorate. Your family, as you said, includes professors.

What are your thoughts on academic freedom? Do you believe that it currently exists and that professors, researchers and graduate students have academic freedom to pursue the research interests that they are interested in pursuing?

Dr. John Robson: I think that academic freedom is in very poor shape these days. The atmosphere on campus is such that if you speak up in class to say that you're in favour of free markets, that you're in favour of Israel or that you think there might be some arguments in favour of America's role in the world, then you really do risk getting chased off campus, and sometimes literally chased off campus.

If you are putting in for a grant, of course you have to say that it will help with climate change and will help with DEI. All of these things are obligatory nowadays. I think, again, that this is just very harmful.

When I went to college years ago, my father said, “Don't study English. The profession's lost its mind.” By the way, I should mention that my father's parents never owned a car. My grandfather, who made good, was the poor boy on scholarships. I can play the poverty card too, if it will help my credibility here.

The critical point is that, as John Stuart Mill said, the state should require that children get an education and make sure that they can afford it, but a state-delivered education is a contrivance for moulding people into conformity. This is what universities now do. The one who pays the piper calls the tune. I want to add that I think it's a very impoverished vision that if they're privatized, all they'll do is sell to the highest bidder. What they'll do is go out and raise money philanthropically in large amounts from the generous people who live in our wealthy country, based on their devotion to research.

You see what's happening in the pharmaceutical industry. What have our lavish subsidies done about that? The Soviet Union had purely public sector research for 70 years and didn't invent one single useful drug.

Mr. Shaun Chen: Very quickly, I will go back to Professor Kitcher.

What do you say to calls to eliminate equity, diversity and inclusion in research?

Mr. Philip Kitcher: I think that they're premature, but I'm prepared to believe that too much emphasis has been placed upon them at a cost to other people.

I said very briefly in my opening statement that you have to attend to the needs of all of the citizens. The fact that some group has been marginalized in the past gives it some right to have that treatment repaired, but it should not come at the cost of marginalizing others.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Kitcher. That's a little bit over our time, but I wanted you to finish your thought.

We'll now turn to MP Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today for this study.

Professor Kitcher, you mention in your work that science needs to be democratic.

Do you think that equity, diversity and inclusion policies are democratic, given that they reject individuals on the basis of considerations other than scientific excellence?

[*English*]

Mr. Philip Kitcher: I'm sorry; I can't understand what the question is. I speak some French, but I cannot follow all of the words of the questioner.

Dr. John Robson: There's a translation option at the bottom of the screen.

The Chair: Yes, at the bottom of the screen, you can hit “English”. Then you'll get the translation.

Dr. John Robson: It's that thing that looks like a globe.

The Chair: They are three little dots. At the bottom of the screen, you'll see more if you click on them.

You have it. That's great.

I'm going to stop the time.

Do you want to ask your question again so that he can hear the English translation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Can we do a test to check if Professor Kitcher can hear the interpretation of the French?

[*English*]

The Chair: Is it still not...?

Mr. Philip Kitcher: I'm afraid not. I'm just hearing the French.

The Chair: Okay, let's suspend.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Chair: We're back in action here.

Do you want to repeat the question one more time?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Professor Kitcher, you often mention in your work that science needs to be democratic.

Do you think that equity, diversity and inclusion policies are democratic, given that they reject individuals on the basis of considerations other than scientific excellence?

[*English*]

Mr. Philip Kitcher: I don't think they are democratic. That's a very simple answer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

Several witnesses have told us that there was a lack of ideological representation and that people who dared to hold views that were different from the established norm were threatened, which seems undemocratic.

You seem to be opposed to exclusion in principle. Would increasing funding for research help make science more accessible, improve diversity and representation, and maybe even support inclusion without having to resort to selective policies?

[English]

Mr. Philip Kitcher: I do think the procedures that you have described are undemocratic and wrong. What has been good about the DEI proposals is that they have brought into the research and teaching community a number of people whose voices had not previously been heard. That is a very good thing. It is not a good thing when you then start excluding people on the grounds that they don't meet those previously marginalized standards.

I said earlier that the problem with a policy to compensate people who had previously been marginalized is that implementing that policy may then marginalize another group. What you're pointing to in your question is that this has happened here. That is wrong. What you've done is create a new set of marginalized people. That's the same kind of wrong you were originally trying to correct. The policy is not only wrong but also fundamentally morally inconsistent.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you for that answer.

Professor Yves Gingras told our committee that science is universal and that there's no point attributing an ethnic identity to innovations.

Do you think that EDI policies run the risk of compromising scientific universalism and the quest for truth in favour of an essentialist vision?

[English]

Mr. Philip Kitcher: Yes, they do run the danger of doing that. However, I think it's fairly well understood. There's good psychological and social evidence on this. Having a number of different perspectives within the research and teaching community brings epistemic benefits—that is, benefits with respect to finding out and justifying the truth.

What is good about this policy is the way it has diversified the research community. A secondary good is that it has made the results of the research community more acceptable and more trustworthy for other people.

We do not want to go back to the days when a certain group of people were shut out from the research community. Those people were deprived of the benefits of scientific research. That is the terrible thing. The DEI movement grew out of trying to correct that. In doing so, it has, I think, gone too far in various respects and made some mistakes. That's just the sort of thing that calls for the detailed ethical investigation that I've been talking about in much of my work.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Could you elaborate on what you would recommend in terms of changing the funding criteria to avoid excluding people on the basis of considerations other than scientific merit?

[English]

Mr. Philip Kitcher: It's advisable to try to train and find young people in various marginalized groups who can then go forward to become equal researchers and leaders of a research community

down the road. The best work I know of that's being done with respect to DEI is work that is trying to train members of communities that have previously been marginalized so that they will be able to compete on equal terms with others. That has been successful in some cases. There's still work to be done with respect to that.

I don't believe that what one wants to do is foster an inferior group of people who not only are regarded by outsiders as being there because of some particular extraneous characteristic but who also regard themselves as having been the beneficiaries of some kind of largesse.

We do want to make this a level playing field, but we also have to realize that the field is currently not level for some groups in our societies, and they need help to get them to a stage where they can compete on equal terms with others.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Philip Kitcher: That's the fundamental point.

The Chair: Okay. That's our time.

For the final six minutes of this round, it will be MP Cannings.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Thank you both for being with us today, especially after the frustration of our last meeting.

I'd like to start with Professor Kitcher.

When I heard you were coming, I went online and watched your McFarland Center lecture with great interest. I wish we had more time to go into some of the broader details of science and society.

I'm not sure if you know this, but here in Canada, the government is trying to develop an umbrella agency over what we have now, our three major research-funding organizations. One is for the natural sciences and engineering, one is for social sciences and one is for health. They would like to have what they're calling a capstone organization over top of that. Part of the reasoning is to make it easier to develop and fund mission-driven science projects.

I think you touched on the need to have science that is mission-driven to help the broader public with urgent needs. My question to the government on this is: Who will choose what missions we take on?

Could you perhaps comment on that, if you were developing such an agency?

• (1640)

Mr. Philip Kitcher: I think what you need to do is get a list of priorities of people's needs in your society that might be accessible to scientific technology if research of various kinds were done.

However, mission-directed science is by no means everything. There has to be a basic understanding of things. That's the way great projects develop. We wouldn't have contemporary molecular medicine had it not been for the fact that in the early 20th century, instead of going straight ahead with trying to use genetics to do something about human health, Thomas Morgan investigated fruit flies.

Mission is not everything.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Exactly.

I don't think this organization is meant to replace basic curiosity-driven science; it's to add another layer that could direct our mission-driven science in a better way. I just wanted to explain that.

This comes back to the question of who's developing the priorities, who should be involved in that conversation and how.

Mr. Philip Kitcher: It has to be an interaction between representatives of the general public—constituencies that can be identified in advance as having problems—and scientific researchers. If you're trying to match research projects with human needs, you'll need to know what the scientists envisage they are going to be able to do and what the public needs.

I've written at some length about this. Chapter five of my book *Science in a Democratic Society* is about what I call “well-ordered science”. That is when this match is worked out and tries to come together.

That's the best I can do in a minute or two.

Mr. Richard Cannings: I want to give you some time to react to Dr. Robson's statements about how government-supported universities and research mould students' minds, and how we have to get away from that. He doesn't want the federal government to pay for research; he wants provincial governments to pay. I'm wondering how that would work. You would think the provincial governments would then mould students' minds. If we went to private universities or private companies, they would then be moulding students' minds. The job of universities is to give students a good education.

Could you comment on the broader question of how we provide that education in an open, transparent and fair manner?

Mr. Philip Kitcher: The first thing I want to say is “Hurrah,” because universities are all about training and educating people and broadening their perspectives.

I have taught at three public universities in the United States and, finally, at Columbia College, which is, of course, a private university. I have not taught at a university where I felt the students were indoctrinated.

I feel that in all of the universities that I entered, many different perspectives were offered to the students. It's especially evident at Columbia College, where students have to take a course that covers a whole broad range of voices from not only the western tradition but other traditions as well. Within the western tradition, the voices

include conservatives and liberals, people who are highly radical on both ends of the spectrum, and I think it's a wonderful thing to offer students that huge, rich menu of options for their thinking.

I have not seen what Dr. Robson has seen. I think, if I had seen a lot of that, I might well be as skeptical as he is about indoctrination, but I think that's not a fact.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you. That's our time.

Now I turn it over to MP Tochor for five minutes to kick off the second round, please.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Thank you.

I turn my attention to Dr. Kitcher. No one's disagreeing with the intent of DEI, just with how it's been rolled out in circumstances that marginalize people. The morally bankrupt factor is that it is indirectly doing what it's apparently trying to stop, which is a little hypocritical. Could you unpack a bit more about how DEI can be morally bankrupting if used improperly?

Mr. Philip Kitcher: I didn't catch the first part of your question. I think you seemed to want me to say something about how DEI, if done properly, would become morally bankrupt.

Mr. Corey Tochor: No. It's if it's done improperly.

Mr. Philip Kitcher: Okay. I think that what DEI has encouraged, as it's actually been done, is a policy of exclusion, and the concern that originally started it was to try to train, educate and help people who had been marginalized, whose resources had not enabled them to participate fully in various parts of society, including the higher academic sphere and scientific research.

They should have been given opportunities to do that long ago. Those opportunities were belated, and when they came, they suddenly contributed to the idea that only people from certain perspectives can investigate certain kinds of things, and that was a terrible blunder.

To prove this—

Mr. Corey Tochor: Thank you for that.

I'm going to split my time now with Branden for the remainder.

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Tochor. I'd like to start with Mr. Robson.

I will echo some of your comments, as someone who has been to university rather recently, compared to many of my member of Parliament colleagues here.

There is—and for Mr. Kitcher's experience—absolutely much indoctrination that happens in universities. In fact, I was almost terrified to share any of my conservative views in classrooms, until I grew enough confidence to do so and proudly stood up, but most people get shouted out of those rooms and are terrified to express anything other than what the so-called mainstream belief among university students is.

However, I am in no way actually opposed to basic research or some of the more technical research. Mr. Kitcher, you mentioned things like genetic research. I come from an agricultural background. The development of CRISPR technology is going to be an absolute game-changer in terms of agriculture and potentially for pre-existing human conditions that we could help prevent—with those ethical boundaries, certainly, being respected.

My question is, to start with Mr. Robson, how do we evaluate? I think there's the technical and economic-driven research, and Mr. Kitcher mentioned.... How do we measure that? I think we need to look at how much commercialization happens, how many patents emerge and how many jobs are created out of this, versus some of the studies that my colleague Mr. Tochor... There are numerous ones, and yes, there's only \$37,000 here and there, but they are ridiculous studies. How do we do a better job of prioritizing research that's actually going to make a difference to society and to our nation, versus some of these...? I don't even know what you call that type of research.

Dr. John Robson: To be honest, I don't think you can. As I was saying earlier, you have other things that you need to be doing.

On this idea of trying to track what the economic, social and cultural impacts of some piece of scientific research will be a decade down the road, nobody knows that, but nobody needs to know it. Scientists are curious people. They will do fundamental research. It isn't something you have to be concerned with. If it turns out to have commercial applications, companies will take advantage of that. There will be useful collaborations. All kinds of things happen under a system of spontaneous liberty that do not happen under a system of political control.

I think having the federal government trying to put a committee on top of three committees to tell scientists what they ought to be doing in the interest of the economy is to misunderstand what you're capable of and what the situation actually requires. If scientists are given jobs, they will go and do research. They want to know what the heck's going on in the lab.

The other thing—

• (1650)

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Robson. I'll turn it over to Mr. Kitcher, because I did mention a couple of points that he made there. Then I'll give you an opportunity to further expand.

You mentioned “track records”, I believe. Who holds the data that would be the best way to measure the track record of previous research and compare it going forward? How does whoever is deciding where this research funding is going best measure where it will likely be successful in the future for human development?

Mr. Philip Kitcher: I think if you go to the biomedical community, they know quite a lot about which kinds of programs have

been successful and what kinds of things have not worked out very well. I think scientists are actually sometimes extremely good at measuring this.

If I may, I will say one thing in response to one of your other points. For many years I have taught courses in contemporary moral problems. I have had students in those courses who have held views far more conservative than mine. I've also had students who have sometimes held views far more liberal than mine. None of those students has ever felt intimidated or unable to speak up in class. I mean—

Mr. Branden Leslie: You are a very nice man, so I suspect that may be the case, but not every professor fits that scenario.

Mr. Philip Kitcher: No, no. Lots of—

Mr. Branden Leslie: Perhaps I'll go back to Mr. Robson, just quickly—

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're actually over our time.

Thank you so much.

I will now turn it over to MP Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes.

No. I'm sorry. I lost the papers. It's MP Longfield.

You have the floor for five minutes of questions.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): That's great. Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. It's good to have diverse opinions and discussion in our committee.

I'll be directing my questions to you, Dr. Kitcher.

I'm currently doing a master's in leadership at the University of Guelph. I would have loved to have you around for the ethics course we did a couple of courses back. We were studying Joshua Greene's book *Moral Tribes* and the tragedy of the commons, which has many meanings, or double meanings, for me. Every time I'm reading, I'm thinking of how tribalism gets in the way of good decision-making.

I think some of what we're talking about here is the tragedy of the commons. We have limited resources being shared among researchers and we are trying to look at how decisions are made to be equitable to researchers, whether they're from small or large schools or from different ethnic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds or language backgrounds, making sure that in Canada, French research is being recognized and accounted for in our decisions.

Could you maybe give us a quick snippet on the tragedy of the commons as it pertains to research funding?

Mr. Philip Kitcher: I think you're dead right, actually. I do think that because you have limited resources, you tend to find that people look around for allies. They form groups. Those groups become tribes. Then you're really off to the races.

I think you've offered a very good answer and a very good diagnosis to some of the things that were said by earlier speakers and some of the questions that were posed. When they were talking about what has gone wrong with DEI, it is perhaps in large measure the fact that when you have a movement to try to compensate some people who have been historically marginalized, those people are hungry and eager for this to happen quickly. They want to consume a larger share of the resources than is being prepared to be given to them. They form alliances. Then what you start to get is a competition that can easily turn internecine, and this is not good.

This doesn't come out of simply the lack of resources. There are occasions on which groups of people, realizing there's a lack of resources, can do better than that. I think what is needed, always, is the ethical perspective. There needs to be a place where ethical discussion happens among people, where people reach compromises and where they agree to share and take away less than what they had originally thought they needed.

• (1655)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you. It is great to have a professor emeritus in the room.

With your experience, you've seen different generations of research going away from the humanities and into the sciences. Ignoring social sciences is one of the key areas, and critical thinking is under assault, especially with social media.

Could you comment on the importance of also having diverse funding in the streams that include social sciences?

Mr. Philip Kitcher: Social science research is very important. It's also very hard to do. There are also fads in the social sciences, unfortunately, and when fads get identified, there's an unwillingness to continue funding in that kind of area, so cash funding starts to seep away.

I have seen in my academic lifetime a considerable number of movements, some of which have been remarkably successful and remarkably profitable, while some have withered, even after quite a lot of money was invested into them.

That is something I think one has to come to terms with in research. Not everything is going to succeed. Scientists...social scientists will not always know what the profitable directions are. It's natural to be disappointed when money is invested and nothing comes out of it, but I think you have to look at the large picture.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: In my notes from last time, your first meeting with us, I see that you said you have to be patient.

Mr. Philip Kitcher: That's exactly right. Funders have to be patient. Good things can happen, but there is a danger in thinking that "We've invested this, and we want our return." Sometimes it takes a lot of time, and that's why basic research often suffers: People are impatient.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

The chair is just about to interrupt us, so I'll just interrupt you before she does that and say thank you so much for your time.

The Chair: Thank you both for the interesting conversation.

Now we will turn to MP Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Professor Kitcher, you stressed the importance of intellectual diversity in academia.

Given that EDI policies exclude certain promising researchers who don't fit these criteria, do you think such policies could push researchers to leave Canada for countries that don't have them?

[*English*]

Mr. Philip Kitcher: Obviously, what happened has been happening. One of the witnesses who is not here today but was here last time clearly felt that she wanted out of the whole system because of this. I feel that's terribly sad.

What I would like to see happen, when that starts to irritate people and make them feel unwanted and unappreciated, is some mechanism through which they can try to correct the ways in which what bothers them is being handled.

We might have had a much better outcome from the DEI policies that have existed if we had been aware at a much earlier stage of the dangers of going overboard. If there had been more conversation and more serious exchange at earlier stages, we might have avoided some of the overshoots that seem to have happened and that are now causing so much trouble.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

I'd like to hear Mr. Robson answer the same question.

[*English*]

Dr. John Robson: I worked at the same think tank that Heather Exner-Pirot worked at because I was essentially pushed out of academia for having the wrong demographics. I mean, you're looking at it here. It's a serious problem to say you're not aware of this. Surveys of the political leanings of the faculty show that they're overwhelmingly to the left. It's absurd. To say, "Had we been warned..." well, of course you were warned. You were warned vocally about this for decades, and people just said, "Oh, yeah; you're a bunch of bigots."

If I may, I'll quickly tell a story.

My parents got their Ph.D.s in the late fifties. They were on the road for a couple of years at UBC and U of A, and then my dad landed a job at the University of Toronto—a plum job. My mom said, "If you can do it, I can do it." When an opening came up in history, she got an interview, and at the end of it the chairman said to her, "Well, that was a good interview, dear, but in this department, we don't hire women." My mother fixed him with a gimlet eye and said, "You're hiring this one," and they did, so there's your DEI.

• (1700)

The Chair: You have 26 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Robson, as you know, the United States is starting to phrase out EDI criteria.

Do you think this could worsen the brain drain of promising Canadian researchers moving to the U.S.?

[*English*]

Dr. John Robson: I think there is a big risk of that. The Americans went a long way into this. Again, it's not the Americans; it's one university after another. They have thousands, very decentralized and many of them private.

I think it won't just be the people who are excluded; it will be the people who want to be hired not on the basis of their identity but on the basis of their research and their quality as teachers.

It's just unfair to treat people according to group characteristics. We finally learned that fact, after many years of a system that was very unfair to people who were not of the demographic majority or were not men, and then we decided to do it again. Why?

The Chair: That's our time, Mr. Robson.

I'm now going to turn it over to Mr. Cannings, please, for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thank you.

I'm going to go back to Professor Kitcher and give him an opportunity to react to something that Dr. Robson said.

One of his themes is that there are a whole lot of things about government bureaucracy that aren't working well. We need to hire more bureaucrats to bolster areas where things aren't going well and we should just unload federal science and federal research, and that would pay for it. He mentioned that the federal government spent \$15 billion in post-secondary education, which he claims is a completely provincial responsibility, which I would disagree with.

Don't you think this is a false dichotomy? I mean, shouldn't we be trying to help the people in all the ways we need to, and one of the ways is to have a good science research program? In this age, science is the real path to innovation and wealth in a country. Canada is way behind all the other developed countries in research investment.

Can you just comment on that aspect, which is the ability of science to really bring good things to the economy of a country?

Mr. Philip Kitcher: Of course, I agree completely with what you've just said.

I think that it should be the case that the needs that Dr. Robson talked about, the needs of people in your infrastructure.... He talked about lots of things, and I'm in no position to know the facts about that, but assuming that he's right about that, those are also important, so what do you do?

If you increase the budget, it would be a good idea to distribute it across all of these needs. If you can't do that, you're dealing with another tragedy of the commons situation. Mr. Longfield already

pointed that out. Under those circumstances, you can either do the awful competitive game in which people sort into tribes and fight one another for limited resources or you can try to have a rational discussion that works things out.

You are completely right: You cannot neglect science. The scientific community, over the course of the 20th century and into this century, has shown how innovation and research—federally funded or publicly funded—can produce a transformation in various societies.

The argument that Vannevar Bush gave just after the Second World War for the establishment of the National Science Foundation in the United States still applies. You have to keep your seed corn. You have to go on doing this research that will only pay off in future years. It's incredibly important, and I think for Canada to turn its back on that would be an utter disaster.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you to both of our witnesses for coming back. I really appreciate it.

If there's anything that you didn't get a chance to cover, you may submit it in writing to the clerk.

Dr. John Robson: Thank you for inviting us.

Mr. Philip Kitcher: Thank you.

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

I'm thinking of our next meeting. The tri-councils weren't able to finish. We finished one half of the previous meeting. Are we going to continue with this study?

The Chair: I believe that the clerk has reached out to them again to see. They weren't available today, so I'm going to say—

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Maybe it will be in January.

The Chair: My gift to the committee was going to be that today was our last meeting. I wasn't planning on calling a meeting Tuesday. We will resume in January. I know MP Tocher is very disappointed. You're free to meet with yourself.

Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Corey Tochor: On that comment, Chair, this study is, I think, exceeding everyone's expectation, and I would hope that into the new year, we may want to consider extending it, especially because of the interruptions in some of the testimony that we're getting, to make sure that we have the best possible report. Hopefully just flag that idea that this study is going as well as it has been. I think an extension of four or five meetings is warranted into the future in the new year as something for us to consider.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I don't—

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: We can have a debate on how many meetings. I was thinking that we might have one or two more meetings, and we could talk to Mr. Blanchette-Joncas as well—

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: —as Mr. Cannings to see what we want to do.

The Chair: Yes, he has the motion there. It's just that our resources are more or less over already.

I believe that the motion said two meetings. I'll give the floor to you, MP Blanchette-Joncas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm perfectly open to extending the study by a few meetings. That will be my Christmas gift.

I just want to ask why we're cancelling Tuesday's meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: We've been really struggling to get witnesses this close to Christmas. If we hadn't been able to call back the witnesses for today, we would have had an open dance card.

We would have originally maybe done a draft report, but I didn't want to do that because I don't feel that the study is finished yet. We don't want to report when we still have witnesses we haven't heard from. I know for sure that we do want to hear from the tri-councils. It was unfortunate that we couldn't hear them yesterday.

That works to your advantage, because at least you'll be able to hear them, but I don't think there's any point. Most of the committee meetings for next week are being cancelled.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Had we already started inviting witnesses for Tuesday?

[*English*]

The Chair: We were trying to get them for Thursday, not Tuesday, and that was a struggle.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: How do we know these people won't respond, if we haven't contacted them?

[*English*]

The Chair: As chair, I have the authority to cancel. I'm just not calling a meeting Tuesday. I'm not cancelling it, but I'm not calling it. I could have made you wait in suspense until Monday to know

that I'm not calling it, but it's not my intention to cut the study short. I want to assure you of that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: All right.

In that case, may I move the motion so we can vote?

[*English*]

The Chair: Can we do that today? Is it the will of the committee to consider it today?

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: That's a good idea.

The Chair: I think it would be good. I'm in favour. I think that's tidy, and then we know. Move your motion, then.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Here's the motion:

That the committee allocate the two meetings following the adoption of this motion to the ongoing study on the impact of various federal funding allocation criteria on research excellence in Canada.

As we discussed, it would be great if we could continue the discussion, because we have a lot of witnesses to hear from and a wide range of views to consider.

I'll let my colleague, Mr. Tochor, add his comments, if he wants.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any discussion on that, or are we ready to vote?

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I'd support the motion. I wouldn't support an amendment.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): I support the motion.

• (1710)

The Chair: Mr. Cannings has his hand up. He supports it. Is there unanimous consent? .

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, that's great.

(Motion agreed to)

Thank you very much, committee.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Merry Christmas.

The meeting is adjourned.

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