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Chair

Mr. Leon Benoit

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• (1640)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone.

We've had a bit of delay in starting the meeting due to voting, as you all know.

I understand the witnesses have agreed they would come back to the next meeting, if we choose to do that. Is there agreement to have the witnesses come back on Tuesday of next week? We have witnesses booked for Thursday. Is it agreed that we do that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

I'd like to thank you for coming. I apologize for the delay. We will see you next Tuesday. Thank you very much. Sorry about that.

Can we guarantee there won't be any delays next week? No. We will do our best.

You may leave the table, and we'll see you next Tuesday.

Before we go in camera to discuss committee business, I understand that Mr. Cullen wants to move a motion that he gave notice of some time ago.

Mr. Cullen, go ahead.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

It's been a little over 48 hours, depending on how you add them up.

In light of testimony from AECL and CNSC officials that confirms that radioactive wastewater has been dumped into the Ottawa River as a result of the heavy water spill at Chalk River on December 5, I move that the Minister of Natural Resources appear before the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to account for the new developments that pertain to the events related to the spill of heavy water at the Chalk River nuclear facility on December 5, 2008.

I'm not sure if they're necessarily ready for it. There may be an amendment proposed.

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Cullen, do you want to speak to the motion?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Sure.

The minister came before the committee to talk about a number of different things. One of them that we didn't necessarily get into because it wasn't in the purview of the budget was around the events at Chalk River. Because it wasn't topical, we didn't raise it. That was fair.

Testimony followed from officials from both CNSC and AECL. The concern we raised and I think a number of my colleagues raised was around what exactly was happening at the facility. Testimony we heard that day in particular seemed to contradict what the minister had been saying when questions of this nature were raised in the House about the nature of spills. What was reported as containment actually meant it was contained for a period of time and then released in water. Or it was put up the smokestack; that was also noted to be containment by the minister. Definitions that everyday Canadians would understand to mean one thing were beginning to mean another.

As well, around the notion of treatment, what is it to treat heavy water that has been contaminated with tritium, which has severe adverse health effects? Treatment, to many Canadians, would mean that the water was then fine; it was fine for consumption; it was fine for Canadians to use as drinking water. We've since heard otherwise from other folks who have come to my office, and I think other offices.

The effort is to allow the minister to clear the record on those two particular instances: contained versus spilled, and treated. What is acceptable treatment by her office's standard and the regulations that guide these various agencies?

That's the basic motion. I encourage conversation and debate.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cullen.

For discussion on the motion, Mr. Regan.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Under this wording, would we be unable to discuss the government's plans for the future of AECL, or would that need a friendly amendment that would say, for example, "and to discuss the future of AECL"?

If it doesn't need it, there's no point in getting into that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is that directed to me, Chair?

The Chair: I'm just considering this, Mr. Cullen. But yes, go ahead.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I want to be clear on Mr. Regan's amendment in terms of the future of AECL.

Part of the testimony from the officials from both AECL and CNSC was around the future: what the repair money was for, and the preparation. There was a comment, which I'm sure struck many of the folks around the table. I'm not sure who put the question to the witness, but they asked whether they have had discussions with the government about the potential sale of AECL. The gentleman, in his testimony, said he has had no informal conversations. He repeated that particular line over and over again. I didn't have a round of questions left, but my question—and I'm sure it came to many committee members—was what kinds of informal or formal conversations had been held. There was some splitting of hairs around a pretty substantial question.

I could imagine there is a connection between the leaks and the expense being incurred in the current budget to repair Chalk River, and the potential for sale. I could imagine those being connected.

I would accept it as a friendly amendment.

The Chair: I'm looking at this, Mr. Regan, and you are saying you would like an amendment to this motion that would include the future plans of the government when it comes to the Chalk River facility. Is that what you're saying?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Yes. Oh, I'm sorry, when it comes to AECL—including Chalk River, obviously, because the minister has indicated that she'd like to separate Chalk River from the rest of the company.

The Chair: I'm just looking at this, and I think that changes substantially this motion. I just think it would require a new motion to make a change like that, to be fair. It is a major change, and I'd have a concern with the committee bypassing the rules that we've put in place by making it an amendment rather than giving the proper 48 hours' notice.

Hon. Geoff Regan: In relation to the first question, which was whether or not questions related to that would be allowed, I guess when she was last here it was on the supplementary B estimates, and we talked about a lot of other things beyond that. So if the same rules apply, then there's no need for any amendment anyway.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. David Anderson: Point of order, then.

The Chair: Yes. We're kind of doing this a bit looser than maybe I should, Mr. Anderson, but it seems like there's a will to go this way, so if you'd like, please comment on this amendment.

Mr. David Anderson: If that's the case, then we should just give her an open invitation. There doesn't have to be anything attached to it at all.

I don't think Mr. Regan wants to completely change the direction of what Mr. Cullen has suggested here. I think that is a major amendment, and certainly if the minister's coming, she's going to want some specifics to talk about. We're already broadening this out, far broader than I think Mr. Cullen intended.

The other point I'd like to make, and probably I'll make a few more here later, is that she has already been here. The opposition

asked us to bring her in and talk about supplementary Bs, and in there was funding for AECL and we had those questions. They've already been addressed. She was good enough to come immediately when we asked her.

So I think realistically this amendment should be defeated, and so should the motion, and we should move on with our planning for the future here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Regan, to your point, you may be right in terms of whether it really would make any difference whether this is amended, but I still have a problem.

•(1650)

Hon. Geoff Regan: I prefer to withdraw it.

The Chair: I appreciate that, and if you'd like that to be in an amendment, I think you should send it in to the clerk.

Hon. Geoff Regan: My plan is to withdraw that, and I would move to amend the motion to add—

A voice: I don't know if he actually made a motion.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, that's right, I didn't at that time, but I would now move to amend this motion to add the words "and to discuss the impact of additional funding on ongoing leaks at Chalk River".

The Chair: Okay, we have a formal amendment now—

Hon. Geoff Regan: Maybe it's a friendly amendment, if my honourable colleague accepts it.

The Chair: —that we have to deal with.

A voice: Can you repeat that?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Yes: "and to discuss the impact of additional funding on ongoing leaks at Chalk River".

The Chair: Just read it one more time, Mr. Regan, please.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Sorry. To add the words: "and to discuss the impact of additional funding on ongoing leaks at Chalk River". I suppose you could say "the possibility of ongoing leaks", but I think that's clear enough.

The Chair: I think that amendment is in order. Let's debate the amendment.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, first of all, I'm not sure of procedure, friendly or what not, but I think the amendment sits fine and it's in light of what we were discussing and the intention of this.

Just in answer to the parliamentary secretary's point, we were very glad, and I think I said so publicly at the meeting, that the minister came forward in such a timely manner. I would suggest, though, that the developments around this were particular, and to say, well, that's supplementary Bs, I would suggest that the chair would have had some trouble with my starting to talk about spills and containment and all the rest.

Secondly, the witnesses we heard following the minister are the reason for this motion. It was the testimony from AECL and CNSC that caused me concern and why I asked the minister, I think the following day or two days later in the House of Commons, to try to clarify the difference between what we heard from officials. That's the nature of the motion. So there is no disparagement on the minister's part in terms of showing up and being present, and her testimony to this point has been direct to the answers—

The Chair: Mr. Cullen, we're actually speaking to the amendment now.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm completely comfortable with the amendment. It is connected into the spills and the lack of containment, and we would move to a discussion and a vote as soon as we can.

The Chair: Okay. Any further discussion on the proposed amendment?

Madame Brunelle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): The Bloc Québécois will be supporting the amendment and the motion. Nevertheless, the public has spoken and has expressed some concerns. It would be a good idea for the Minister to clarify matters. In the supplementary estimates, substantial sums of money have been allocated to the Chalk River facility. Therefore, it is very important to gauge the impact on the budget and to get a clear picture of the situation. So then, we intend to vote in favour of the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Any more discussion on the amendment to the motion?

Mr. Allen.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bains had declared this in order, so I guess now we'll have to talk to it.

On the amendment, as I see it, in discussing the impact of additional funding, I would have two problems. In discussing the impact of additional funding on ongoing leaks at Chalk River, that's assuming there's a plan to fix the ongoing leaks, and if there are any ongoing leaks. So they're really not ongoing. We've had a couple in the past. We had two pin-hole leaks, which we talked about in the last committee, which the folks at AECL talked to us about. They were on a self-contained pipe that was actually inside the containment building.

So to me, if you're even going to word something like this, you would have to be talking about the additional funding and what that

additional funding would do to prevent any future leaks in the long run.

Then I would maintain that the minister's a darn poor one to be talking about this subject, quite frankly. I think it's the people at AECL and the people who are actually running the Chalk River unit who are the ones that should actually be talking about this issue, and not the minister. They know the unit better than anybody else does. So I would say it's going to have to be some of the witnesses who we had here the other day, including Mr. Pilkington and some others, who should probably be talking about this.

I can't agree with this, because, really, I think the minister, first, is not the right one to talk about this, and secondly, to counter Mr. Regan, I'm not really sure it's very clear. I think it's in terms of what we want to try to do in the future, as opposed to ongoing leaks.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allen.

Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Chair, this is so vague that I'm not even sure what he's talking about. Over the past year, we've put \$300 million into AECL. We put another \$100 million or \$150 million at Christmastime; we put another \$350 million in the budget here. So I don't know if he's talking about that funding, which is the traditional funding source that we have going through the department and government to AECL, or if he's talking about some new funding that he wants for something else.

The minister's going to come here and not even know what this impact of additional funding is. So is he talking about wanting to have extra funding here? Is he talking about the funding that we've already put in? I know we've been generous. Actually, it's good that the opposition has recognized that. Certainly we're funding these folks to a level where they can do their jobs, and we're happy to do that.

I think we need some more explanation from Mr. Regan. I know what he's trying to do. He wants to get around to the issue that he had before that you ruled out of order, but I'm not sure this is going to allow him to do that. I'd certainly like some explanation as to what level of funding he's talking about, where it's come about. Is it funding we've already been so generously willing to provide, or is he talking about funding for the future for Chalk River or for AECL and the entire nuclear development in Canada?

The Chair: Mr. Regan, do you want to clarify what you're looking at here, what you'd like to be examined here?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Sure, Mr. Chairman.

David certainly talked about the fact that there's been additional funding. There's no mystery that additional funding has been announced. I talked at the last meeting about the fact that they went from \$100 million a few years ago to nearly \$1 billion over two years, in this fiscal year and the next one. So, clearly, there's additional funding. The question is, what impact is that going to have? How are they going to use it to solve these problems and the ongoing ones?

I would think that these members would be concerned about the production of isotopes and would want to be sure that this continues and that there aren't major interruptions and major problems, particularly at a time right now when we have the facility in the Netherlands, the other major producer in the world of isotopes, shut down. Chalk River is at double production, and the world is relying on us. I'm surprised to hear that they're not interested in looking at these issues, when there have been a series of leaks and problems there, and it would be good, it seems to me, to get reassurance about where they're going.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the amendment?

Mr. Allen

Mr. Mike Allen: Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

Mr. Regan was actually factually wrong in the statements he just made.

The other day, when AECL was here, the questioning came from this side, and it was directed from me. I was concerned about the isotope problem that we could have and the potential outages that would be required to do things at that unit. I was wondering how long that would be, considering that two projects they are currently doing—Point Lepreau and Bruce—are behind. Wolsong is also on a new schedule. So with that in mind, I'm very concerned about that possibility. At the same time, it is still these folks from AECL, and that's my point. The right people to talk about that are the people who actually run the unit. The minister would not have first-hand knowledge of the technical aspects of that or of what the value for money would be for the correction in the budget money that we're actually putting into those facilities at Chalk River. They should be the ones to talk about it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allen.

Mr. Trost.

• (1700)

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Admittedly, I'm at a little bit of a disadvantage because I was away last week on parliamentary business when we were discussing this. Listening to Mr. Allen, I have to say he is making roughly the same point I was going to make. I don't see the point in having the minister here is to discuss more funding for solving what is essentially a technical problem—the leaks down there. Minister Raitt is very talented, but she's not a civil containment engineer or a nuclear engineer, so I don't really see the value in bringing her here and then asking technical questions.

When it comes to additional funding, that's essentially such a broad fishing mission that I don't see how it really gets back to the problem we're looking at, which is whether we need to take any political oversight or political direction in order to take care of any potentially dangerous radioactive or heavy water spills.

The only reason I can see for having the minister before the committee is in regard to some political or general policy directive as far as safety involving these things here goes. From my under-

standing of the issue, it is much more of a smaller technical problem at that level. The minister should be concerned, in that it's her entire department, and she wants to be responsible for everyone under her, but I don't really see how it would be necessary or even helpful to have someone who basically gives political direction come here and be asked questions about technical things. She'd just end up referring to her officials, whoever she brought on who handles those affairs for her anyway.

The Chair: Mr. Hiebert, go ahead.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): I'm just waiting for Mr. Regan to join the conversation.

Hon. Geoff Regan: This must be brilliant, now that you have my attention. I'll wait for that. I look forward to this being absolutely brilliant. Thanks.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: The expectations are too high.

The Chair: Always go through the chair, Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, we have launched ourselves into an integrated community energy systems study. It would seem to me perfectly appropriate for us to continue that study. We have witnesses lined up. The clerk has done an excellent job of filling the calendar with people like the ones we were supposed to hear from today, so it seems rather odd that the opposition is trying to derail a study that they already agreed to, as regards what we're currently doing.

All I can make of this is that it is an attempt for further fearmongering on the part of the opposition when we know that is simply not the case. We had representatives from AECL tell us very clearly that there is no reason to be concerned, Mr. Regan. They said very clearly that there is no risk to the public.

I'm not sure what angle they're trying to tease out of these officials—they would be, of course, the ones to speak to again—or what value there would be for taxpayers if our current study were derailed. Can they answer that question?

The Chair: Are there any further comments?

Mr. Anderson, you're still on the list on the amendment.

Mr. David Anderson: I have a few comments. I think Mr. Hiebert is making some very good comments here. We've already moved on to something else, and I'm not sure why we're dealing with this right now. We had quite a discussion about whether we wanted to have the minister here to discuss the nuclear issues, and she was willing to come. We had the discussion, and this goes more to the heart of the original motion of Mr. Cullen. But there was no new information presented, so I don't know why he's bringing that forward.

Further to the amendment, that's precisely why she was here. She came to talk about the funding for the AECL generally and for the Chalk River reactor. The discussion was about those kinds of things. It doesn't make any sense, and I think that's how the invitation will be seen, when she's already been here to address those very issues. Now we're inviting her to come back to do the same thing again. The response will likely be, "We've done that. That's why we were there, and we had those conversations." The opposition had a chance to ask those questions, and if they had taken it they would have received the answers they requested.

We agreed to one meeting. We had the meeting and we've moved on to other things now. I think we need to see that through.

So I'm going to make the suggestion that we table this motion until we're done our integrated energy partnership study, and then come back to it at that time.

• (1705)

The Chair: Is that a suggestion or a motion?

Mr. David Anderson: I'll make it into a motion.

The Chair: The motion is to adjourn debate.

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: If there is no further discussion on the amendment to the motion, we will go to the vote on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the motion as amended?

Mr. Allen.

Mr. Mike Allen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Anderson was raising a very good point here a minute ago when we were talking about the amendment. We did agree some time ago to hold the one meeting on this. I think that in fairness to this, we have moved on. If we're always going to be bringing up new stuff and derailing the committee business....

Mr. Chair, I agree that committees are masters of their own destinies, but at the same time, it doesn't promote a whole lot of goodwill when we end up debating stuff over and over and over, and we keep bringing stuff up, and we agree to a course of action, such as our community energy study—which I know some of the others on the other side really want to do—and then we turn around and actually change that.

Mr. Chair, when I was looking at this and at the testimony of the folks the other day from the AECL and CNSC, just following the line of questioning then, I'm really not sure this motion adds a whole lot of value at this time, because we clarified things then. I just want to repeat, Mr. Chair, that I think we got these things on the record from AECL. I want to follow that line of questioning we were on then, when I said:

My understanding, based on the questions that were put to the CNSC and everything before, is that tritium emissions are not new. This happens all the time and it's part of the regular process of the reactor. The leak we're talking about was two pinholes, as Mr. Pilkington said. It was self-contained within the reactor itself and there was no risk whatsoever to humans based on that leak. Is that true?

Mr. MacDiarmid, in his response, said, "That is correct. Maybe the chief nuclear officer, as the executive responsible, should have a say as well."

Mr. Pilkington concluded, "Yes, that is correct. You're speaking of the latest leak, which occurred this past weekend."

And my next question was, "Right, but the tritium levels that are normal have been a normal course of operation at the Chalk River reactor for eons, right?"

Mr. Pilkington responded:

Yes, the total amount of tritium that would have been released as a result of the event on the weekend was initially estimated to be about 18 kilograms, and with more refined calculations we determined that it was in the order of 11 kilograms. That's 11 kilograms of heavy water that would have been released through the ventilation system. That was in fact monitored, recorded, and will be reported.

Then I asked, "Following that, there's also tritium that's released as a normal course without any leaks. Is that correct?"

Mr. Pilkington once again responded:

That's correct. A facility like Chalk River has a low chronic level of tritium release

—"chronic" meaning all the time, the last time I checked—

both through the ventilation system and through the liquid effluents that are treated in our waste treatment centre and released. That is correct.

My next question was, "Therefore it is not a new phenomenon. Mr. MacDiarmid, you said you are very mindful of the need to acquire the licence renewal."

So in responding to that line of questioning, AECL was very, very structured in their response. It took us three or four questions to get to it, but Mr. Pilkington was very clear in his answer, and so was Mr. MacDiarmid, that these are chronic things that happen at Chalk River as part of the normal course of business.

So, Mr. Chair, I'm not sure why we're.... The minister's been very straightforward in all of her responses in the House and here that humans were not adversely impacted. AECL has said the same thing, and so has CNSC. So I think we're going on a fishing expedition on this one, if you will, and I really don't see the point of debating it any further. The fact is that this really shouldn't....

• (1710)

My point here would be to say if the committee wants to invite the minister back at some point in time, then that might be relevant, but at the end of the day, the minister has already spoken to this. We already know from the officials, in that questioning on the day we had, that this information did come out and that there's no further value in having this motion go on.

Mr. Chair, I firmly believe that the motion is just a waste of the committee's time. We could be doing things that are a lot more productive in terms of continuing our study on the community energy projects. I felt bad today when we had that number of votes, nine standing votes, and of course we were tired from getting up and down, but walking over here took us a lot of extra time too.

We had the people here from the Green Building Council and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which would have given us a heck of an opportunity to ask some great questions, and now here we are back at this again.

I'm concerned that in the future, in the next meetings, Mr. Chair, this is going to continue, and we're going to keep bringing up these red herrings, if you will. I think this is off-base and we should just be dropping it and moving on to the order of business that we've adopted on our schedule.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allen.

I have Mr. Trost and Mr. Cullen on the speaking list, speaking to the motion as amended.

Mr. Bradley Trost: I know that not everyone sat on this committee in the previous Parliament, but one of the things that frustrated me on the committee in the previous Parliament was that every so often we would have no basic scientific understanding of questions. There was basic scientific illiteracy.

I can understand that not everyone will get this, but we had discussions about the half-life of isotopes and there were questions to the officials about why you couldn't store an isotope with a certain amount of half-life, radioactive decay, and things of that nature. There seemed to be some idea that you could manufacture it and put it away. Then we had—this was amazingly ridiculous—people who didn't understand the difference between a one in a thousand year probability and a one in a thousand probability, something that could be differentiated in a high school statistics class. These sorts of things tend to frustrate me. I understand in the general press....

My concern, when we start to go back and look at these issues again and again, is that we need to have some sort of basic scientific background for what's serious and what's not. I think it was very appropriate that you had one hearing on this to see if this was something that was serious or not, because reports in the popular press often cannot differentiate between normal radioactivity and a Chernobyl type of situation. They don't understand that.

For people who don't know: you can get radioactivity from wooden buildings, from brick buildings, and from your TV. Every day, from everything around us, we get doses of radiation. It's not just from things such as X-rays at a dentist's office or so forth. Just being in a wooden or brick building gives you different levels of radiation.

This brings me to my concern here. We talk here about the heavy water, about the spills, and about things like that. Throughout the whole world, any industrial facility of any size will have spills. I come from a farm family. We spilled oil on the ground every so often when we changed the oil in our tractors, our trucks, and things like that. Was getting a little bit of oil in there good for the environment? Of course not, but these things actually do happen.

What we have to do when we look at events is put them in the proper context and understand the scientific scale that we're dealing with. The reason I'm opposed to this is that we are taking this from what's incredibly minor, almost trivial. It was proper to find out whether or not it was trivial, whether or not it was a major incident, and whether or not it was something of sufficient interest, but we've

done that. All we can do now is try to exaggerate its importance or create it to be something that it's not.

My colleague will eventually figure out how to turn off his phone here.

• (1715)

The Chair: Yes. I would like to ask the member to turn the volume down on his phone so it's—

Mr. Bradley Trost: There's a vibrate and a silence option on those things too.

The Chair: You'd figure out the technology really quickly, I'm sure.

Mr. Bradley Trost: It's something they just don't teach at MP school like they did in the old days.

The Chair: We didn't have cell phones back when some of us started.

Mr. Bradley Trost: With my long speech basically ended, what I am saying is that I'm appealing to members not to support this, because we need to be able to differentiate between the trivial and the substantive when it comes to scientific issues.

Everywhere we go, there's radiation around us. There's background radiation. Every industrial plant of any size has leaks and spills and so forth if they do anything. From what I've heard of the testimony, what Mr. Allen read, the accounts I've seen, and the people I've talked to who were here at the meetings, this does not qualify as a substantive event.

Instead of concentrating on something trivial like this, we need to move on to our report and actually get something accomplished instead of having one-off sessions that don't actually lead to any report.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trost.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Chair.

In the interest of time and productivity, which the government members have called for, I'll keep my comments brief, as we've now gone on for nearly 45 minutes discussing one single motion.

I apologize for the need to vote in the House of Commons. I know what a hassle that can be when we're passing \$260 billion worth of taxpayer money. It's a drag.

The motion, as put before us, was a very simple presentation of a contradiction of a witness's testimony. We heard the witness present that there were no leaks, that it was contained. Then we found out that containment, under the definition of the minister, I suppose, means when water flows out after it has leaked out of a reactor, then it is held for a while, and then it is put into a public river, that is not a leak; it is in fact a containment. When there's a leak of radioactive isotopes out of one of our reactors that then goes up a stack without any treatment whatsoever, that is also not a leak.

I think it behoves the minister...and I suspect, knowing the minister to the point that I do so far, that she'll have no problem in answering these questions. I don't understand the opposition from the government on this. If clearing the air is what they're about, and accountability in terms of such a critical part of Canada's future prospects, with the billions of dollars that have gone into this industry, it seems like it would very much calm the public's nerves and help us, as committee members, to understand how a containment is called a containment if there's actual radioactive material leaving the facility, and how treatment is called treatment when the water is in fact just as radioactive as when it was first leaked. I think those are basic understandings.

The questions I've put to the minister have been as clear and straightforward as I can make them. After hearing from the experts—which Mr. Trost unfortunately didn't, but he's since caught up with the notes, and that's good—I think today it behoves us to move to the vote and get on with things, if productivity is clearly....

Apparently Mr. Anderson wants that in, but I think the understanding is clear.

I wish we would move forward so we can discuss the rest of the engaging calendar that we have before us, which the clerk has done such an admirable job on.

The Chair: Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: I would like to move ahead with the calendar we have before us. We have a choice to make as well, but I was looking forward to hearing the witnesses today from the Green Building Council and the FCM. But we'll have to take a look at our schedule and try to sort things out.

We have witnesses on Thursday, and now we have witnesses next Tuesday, but we still haven't set a schedule for our own hearings on the integrated energy partnership, and I think that's frustrating the members on the government side. I hope it's frustrating the members on the opposition side, because we should have been at that and had that done already.

Mr. Trost talked a little about the past and this committee. One of the things we did last year, in terms of that forestry report, was put a report together that everybody agreed on. The credibility that's given to reports that come out with all-party agreement has always amazed me. I think we were looking forward to trying to make sure we did one with this integrated energy partnership. Hopefully we can still work toward that. But if we're going to start splitting hairs on issues where there are none, as we see in other committees where the parties don't agree, you end up not being able to present a report that's unanimous.

One of the things I've noticed is that unanimous reports do get consideration. The government treats them seriously and industry treats them seriously. We certainly want to move ahead on this energy partnership, but maybe I'll talk about that in a few minutes.

I want to come back to the motion we're dealing with here. It's frustrating. I understand Mr. Cullen has to try to make his political points here, but that's the only thing happening on this motion, because even in the wording of it there are no new developments. We all sat here for the testimony and heard the witnesses who came forward. We heard Mr. Binder from the CNSC. I thought he gave a

very clear presentation of the responsibilities of the CNSC and how they have fulfilled them in this case. I guess I was surprised by how clearly he said there was no threat to human safety in any way, shape, or form when these leaks took place.

Mr. Cullen heard that as well as we did. Mr. Binder was clear on several occasions. He said he was surprised there was so much public attention on such an event, when it was handled so cleanly and clearly by both the regulator and the operator. That really said it all to us. There isn't anything new here, and I think the minister is probably going to take that position as well when the opposition tries to force this through. If they pass it, I think the response will be that there are no new developments; we don't have anything to talk about here; and we're not sure what you're asking for, because there was nothing new on the leaks, other than the fact that there was no threat to human health and safety. The leaks were contained, and Mr. Cullen knows that. We were told several times that no water from the leaks ended up in the river. The leaks were contained, the product was stored, and it has been properly taken care of.

As Mr. Trost pointed out, every industrial operation has leaks at times, and the real issue is what they do with them and how they handle them. In this case we were assured by both the operator and the regulator—who is the one responsible for this—that there was nothing there. There was no threat to human health and safety. There was nothing in terms of the shutdown that we need to explore. We've received full information on the shutdown and what took place there, and there was certainly nothing on the side of human risk.

So I guess it's a little frustrating to have sat here now for most of our hour—when we were planning to get to this schedule—talking about a motion that is unnecessary. If the committee wants to invite the minister to come to committee they can do that, but the invitation should actually deal with some part of reality so she can then come and say, “Here's the issue we're going to deal with”.

The amendment passed, so I'm going to come back to my criticism of that. We had the opportunity to discuss the impact of additional spending on both Chalk River and AECL, and the opposition chose to use very little of their time to do that. So I don't know why we're coming back to trying to hold another meeting when we were good; we cooperated. The opposition asked for one meeting on these issues. We went along with that and felt that was reasonable. Then we thought we'd move on to something we could actually work on together.

• (1720)

So again, there were no contradictions there. Mr. Allen read out the testimony and I'm sure he'd read it again if people didn't hear it the first time. The tritium levels are within the limits that are laid out. They talked not only about the nuclear standards, but also the international standards for tritium, and the rates there are within, by far, those set parameters.

The CNSC came as a regulator and told us that this was contained. There was no contradiction between the witnesses, in spite of what Mr. Cullen wants to try to create. I think what probably happened here is that the opposition came to that meeting with some great expectations that they were somehow going to find something and that there was going to be a news story, because they've been trying to keep a dead news story going for a few weeks on this issue. They got here, and were very disappointed to find out that, again, there was nothing. As Mr. Binder put it, there was no risk to anyone's health or safety.

As Mr. Hiebert or Mr. Allen talked about, I wish we could move on to substantive issues rather than dealing with trivial ones.

• (1725)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. David Anderson: In a committee, I think we all want to deal with the substantive issues. We want to deal with the things of substance. We want to move ahead with the study, try to get it taken care of. I think our schedule is a substantive issue; we've got to make a decision about whether we go to six or seven meetings here, or if we try to jam all of this thing into three or four meetings. Clearly, I think we should spend a little more time on this and do it properly. But with each of these meetings that we spend discussing these trivial issues that we've already discussed, it just means that we've got either one less day to study the energy partnerships or it extends one day further down the road.

I don't know how much more I should say.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Anderson: I think what we're saying is important.

I'd actually like to practice *en français* at some point, but I don't think you want it today. I'll tell you what we'll do. Mr. Chair. There seems to be some request for me to try to cover some of these issues in French, so what we can do is probably come back next meeting and we can do that.

The Chair: I do want to say, Mr. Anderson, that I won't allow you to just repeat the same message, because one thing I'm watching for and listening for is that there's not repetition of the exact same message. So far, I haven't heard a lot of that. I certainly wouldn't want you to be repeating the same message in French, Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: Well, if I came, and if I try that, Mr. Chair, I don't know if you'll be able to tell that I am.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Anderson: No, I'm certainly not done. I fully appreciate the encouragement from the other members. If Mr. Allen has some more to say, I don't want to stop him.

But I'd like to move away from the trivial games. Maybe if we leave the meeting here, Mr. Cullen would reconsider and pull back his motion. Certainly at some point the minister will be returning. I think she comes back for the main estimates at some point in time. We don't want to be involved in having to play political games and trying to manoeuvre at every committee meeting.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Point of order.

The Chair: There's a point of order.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I just want to clarify how the committee's rules are established. Since the motion has been called today, will the vote proceed at the end of committee hearings, prior to you striking the gavel? I just want to make sure that's how we do things. I understand the government's going to try to talk the clock out, but I just want to ensure that process.

The Chair: We have to come back to it as the first item on the next agenda.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So in terms of productivity, the government has the option of continuing to speak to the motion, burn committee meeting after committee meeting, if they so choose. I just want to understand our rules.

The Chair: Yes, as long as they don't start repeating. I'm not going to sit here and listen to the same thing repeated over and over. Anyone is free to speak at this committee. I'm not going to interfere with that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So I'll make the point in this point of order that there's been repetition. "There's nothing new" or "there's no contradiction" has been said at least a half dozen times tonight. I appreciate you looking for the repetition, but the point of that argument has been made by all members who have spoken to this point, and it's now taken us 45 minutes.

The Chair: This is a point of debate, Mr. Cullen, not a point of order.

On a point of order, Mr. Regan.

Hon. Geoff Regan: On the point of order, am I correct that we only adjourn by agreement?

The Chair: I end the meeting when the time that was allocated on the agenda is over.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I think you'll find if you check with the clerk, Mr. Chairman, that technically you seek the agreement of the committee to adjourn. If there's no agreement to adjourn, there's no adjournment.

The Chair: I have to deal with the point of order here.

Yes, Mr. Regan has made a valid point. There are certain circumstances where commonly as chair I certainly wouldn't ask for a motion to adjourn. In this case it's pretty clear there isn't unanimous agreement or consensus to adjourn. It would be hard for me as chair to move ahead and do that, so your point of order is well taken, Mr. Regan.

Where shall we proceed from here?

Yes, Mr. Anderson, then Mr. Bains.

• (1730)

Mr. David Anderson: Can I make a motion to adjourn, then?

The Chair: You can make a motion to adjourn.

Mr. David Anderson: Okay, I'll make that motion.

The Chair: There is a motion to adjourn.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Does that motion to adjourn go before the vote?

An hon. member: Before another motion? He can't do that.

The Chair: There's no debate on this. We go directly to a vote.

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: Okay, we will continue.

We have a speaking list. Mr. Shory, Mr. Allen, on this motion as amended.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I'm new on this committee, Mr. Chair, I just want to understand what we are trying to achieve in these committees. Do we want to be productive or just waste time all the time? I noticed this in previous meetings as well. Today I'm noticing we are dealing with a motion for more than one hour. As far as the motion is concerned, I can see that the wording of the motion says "In light of testimony from AECL and CNSC officials", which means to my understanding that there is something new that invokes the return of the minister. To me, none of the officials said that there was any risk to any human life or that there was any damage that was considerably noticeable.

So I don't know what the intention is here. I guess, to my understanding, it seems like even though there are no new developments, it's a matter of sidetracking ourselves so that we do not get on to productive activities rather than.... We are playing games. This is what my understanding is, and I definitely oppose that the minister be invited now.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shory.

Mr. Allen.

Mr. Mike Allen: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak to this motion again.

I'm going to bridge from the point we were making before, just so we're not repetitious. We were saying that there's nothing new. It's true, and it's true of all the points that have been made, that there's really nothing new to be gained from doing this. But I think it's also important that it might be premature, as well.

Mr. Chair, I'd just like to go back to some of the testimony from when AECL was here, when I was talking with Mr. MacDiarmid. This is very much to the point of this motion, talking about the funding. There's nothing new in terms of what we should be trying to achieve with this and when we should be trying to achieve something with this.

I said the following to Mr. MacDiarmid: "You said you're very mindful of the need to acquire the CNSC licence renewal in 2011. Your comment was that we need to invest in the reactor and support systems for life extension."

My point at that point in time was that we are two and a half years from this. This licence is going to expire in 2011. What are we going to do? I wanted to know if these investments in the reactor are going to be done as part of normal outages. "Will they be done as part of normal outages and as part of a project, or how is that going to be done?" I asked.

Mr. MacDiarmid, of course, put that over to Mr. Pilkington, who I think is one of the right people to be answering these questions, and

Mr. Pilkington said this: "The isotope supply reliability program is a fairly broad program. It involves improvement to equipment and systems and to procedures. It involves long-term planning for succession planning for staffing for the NRU reactor". I think that is an important point. We can all agree that some of the staffing issues and some of the labour force issues we're encountering today are very important, not only to this industry but to others. I think a lot of people can say that they'll have people retire over the next ten years. Fifty percent of their people will retire over the next ten years.

• (1735)

The Chair: Mr. Allen, would you mind kind of holding your comments, at least for now? There's been some discussion....

Mr. Mike Allen: There appears to have been some discussion going on—

The Chair: There's been some discussion—

Mr. Mike Allen: —and I feel slighted that they weren't paying attention.

The Chair: —and I can't say whether this will lead to a solution.

Mr. Mike Allen: I was just coming to make a good point, and nobody's paying attention.

The Chair: If this is not accepted, you'll be allowed to go back to it, Mr. Allen.

Hon. Geoff Regan: You have many good points, undoubtedly.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen and Mr. Anderson have had some discussion. Mr. Cullen, do you have a proposal here, or an informal proposal?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's an informal proposal.

These things happen sometimes at committee. We all end up in some sort of bind that it was not anyone's particular desire to create.

I'm seeking unanimous consent from the committee to amend the motion, which may take out the parts that are causing consternation on the government side. It is that we invite the Minister of Natural Resources to appear before the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to discuss issues relevant to the Chalk River nuclear facility.

I assume that it has to be attached to the amendment we've already made.

The Chair: Yes.

This would require unanimous consent.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's correct. Thank you, Chair.

First, I'm seeking unanimous consent to alter my own motion, which is not procedurally correct but which happens from time to time.

The Chair: Yes. If we get unanimous consent, it will be for that motion, just as you have prepared it.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's correct. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Anderson, do you have a question?

Mr. David Anderson: Just for clarity, are we amending the amended motion, or are we amending Mr. Cullen's original motion?

The Chair: We'd be replacing the amended motion with what Mr. Cullen said. This is informal. It would require unanimous consent, but it can be done in that fashion.

Is there unanimous agreement to Mr. Cullen's proposal?

A voice: Could he repeat it?

The Chair: Would you repeat the proposal, Mr. Cullen?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I propose that the Minister of Natural Resources appear before the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to discuss issues relevant to the Chalk River nuclear facility.

The Chair: Did you hear it?

Some hon. members: Yes.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: Do we pass the motion?

The Chair: Yes, the motion was passed.

Is there agreement to adjourn the meeting now? I'm looking for unanimous agreement. Is it agreed?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's just that—

The Chair: There is a point of order from Mr. Anderson, and then I see Mr. Cullen.

Mr. David Anderson: The agreement was to amend the motion, and we agreed to amend the motion. I didn't hear us pass the motion.

The Chair: We did replace it, and by unanimous consent we passed it. That was done.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I think, Chair, just for technical reasons, that we may seek a vote on division or something. We just want to know what the record is actually going to say about this.

The Chair: Okay, we can do that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Let's pass it on division. That will satisfy.

The Chair: Okay, let's go to a vote on this new motion of Mr. Cullen's—

• (1740)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: And I would move that we do it on division.

The Chair: —or on the amended motion.

(Motion agreed to on division)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I have just a small thing about our calendar before we break up. We have the list from the clerk's office. Is it possible for us to be sending suggestions directly through that office about witnesses and what not? Is that how we shall proceed?

The Chair: Shall we deal with that at the end of the next meeting and try for that?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: If we can get half an hour for that, I promise not to move any motions.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Tonks.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Just for clarification, Mr. Chairman, did the representatives from QUEST also put in some suggestions with respect to deputies who might be called?

The Chair: They did. Has that been circulated yet?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Marie-France Renaud): No. It's only in English.

The Chair: It's only in English, and we'll have to get translation. So it can't be circulated. It will be circulated as soon as it's translated.

We will deal with future business of the committee, then, during the last half hour of the next meeting.

Until then, the meeting is adjourned.

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