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Chair

The Honourable Judy A. Sgro

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): Good morning. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, meeting number 48. Pursuant to the order of reference of Tuesday, February 7, 2017, a study of water quality has been referred to the House.

I welcome the sponsor of that particular order, Mr. Bob Bratina. Welcome to our committee. I know it's your first time coming here and having a chance to spend some time with us.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): It's a pleasure, thank you.

The Chair: We look forward to hearing the information on this particular motion.

Just before Mr. Bratina starts, we have 25 students from the École nationale d'administration publique in Quebec who are going to be observing our committee today, at least for the first hour. Welcome to all of you.

Mr. Bratina, please go ahead.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thank you.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency states that lead is the most serious environmental health hazard for children under six years of age in the United States. Lead poisoning has been dubbed the “silent epidemic” because of its increased prevalence worldwide. According to recent statistics, about three to four million young children suffer from lead poisoning. This type of poisoning is more common among children under six years of age, affecting one in every six children. One major problem is that most parents are unaware that their child has lead poisoning, and often it is too late when they have their child tested.

Building owners are responsible for the pipes and water within their premises, so what do homeowners with newborn children and modest incomes do about replacing lead service lines or otherwise dealing with water quality problems in their households? What role can and should the federal government play in this national public health issue?

In Hamilton, we began dealing with lead exceedances in the municipal drinking water 10 years ago. I was a councillor in one of the old wards, the downtown ward, of the city. Public works was at first reluctant to increase the number of household tap tests beyond what was required by the province. The reason we found out about it is quite interesting. It was because London, Ontario, was found to

have lead exceedances. So the province decided this could be a broader issue; let's test many municipalities. They did 28 or more municipalities, including Hamilton. The information was gathered but never revealed until a newspaper article in the *London Free Press*, in which I found out, as the downtown councillor, that Hamilton had lead exceedances.

The province required the municipalities to do tests to see what the pervasiveness of this problem was in the city. I said to the public works department, “I want to do more tests in my downtown area, because these are older areas and people of lower incomes”. The answer was, “How much money do you want to spend, because the more we test, the more we find”. I said, “Okay, let's test the blood lead levels of the children in the affected areas”. A groundbreaking study of about 700 children was carried out, and sure enough, those children in those specific areas did have higher lead levels, significantly higher than the average across the population. That's a very important part and I'll come back to that later.

Now that we know we have lots of lead pipes and lead exceedances in the drinking water of households, what do people do when they are of modest income and they find out that it's \$1,500 to \$2,000 to take that lead pipe out? To assist those families, we created a loan program that allowed them to remove the lead service line on their property, paid for on their water bill, repaid over several years; I think 10 years is the program. In Hamilton, we are replacing 500 to 1,000 lead service lines in the city as a result of this program. It's also being done in London, Guelph, and Ottawa. Staff in Toronto recommended the plan to Toronto council and that council turned the plan down, referred to as one of those fiascos and why don't they just go to the bank and get a loan.

While most provinces abide by the Canadian maximum allowable concentration for lead presence, 10 micrograms per litre, unfortunately we still hear of cities and towns across Canada discovering heightened levels of lead in the tap water of buildings, homes, and schools.

In Surrey, B.C., six elementary schools have been shown to have up to eight times the allowable lead concentration in their drinking water. Unfortunately, the comments by the experts around that problem are as follows: If parents are concerned about their child's development, they're worried about other sources of lead—for example, through paint or toys. I think continuing to monitor the situation is probably the best thing we can do at this point and provide support to both the school districts and education to the public in general.

●(1110)

Parents can be reassured that, at the population level, there's no evidence that British Columbia blood levels are affecting their health. Well, that's fine at the population level, across the board, everybody, rich areas, poor areas. But when you go to the poorer areas, children are ingesting lead, which could affect the development of their brain.

In Flint, Michigan, more than 1,700 residents are suing the United States government's Environmental Protection Agency for its mismanagement of the water crisis after extremely high levels of lead were leaching into the drinking water. The lawsuit states that the EPA failed to warn citizens of the dangers of consuming lead and failed to ensure that state and local authorities were accurately addressing the crisis on the ground. The plaintiffs are seeking \$722 million in damages. The law suit states:

This case involves a major failure on all levels of government to protect the health and safety of the public. Local, state and federal agencies and employees, working individually and at times in concert with each other, mismanaged this environmental catastrophe.

This case can serve as a lesson on the importance of our governments having a unified approach to removing lead pipes and improving drinking water quality across the country. The federal government must work with its provincial, territorial, municipal, and indigenous partners in unison.

Lead toxicity has been studied at great length through blood level tests. The Canadian guideline is currently 10 milligrams per litre, which seems minute, but Health Canada, the World Health Organization, and many other toxicity experts agree that no amount of lead consumption is safe and severe health effects are occurring as a result.

Understanding this, Health Canada's federal-provincial-territorial committee on drinking water is planning to update the Canadian drinking water guidelines for lead. A document has been released online and is open for public consultation until March 15. This consultation began in January. I brought my private member's motion forward in November of last year. In January, Health Canada said let's look at reducing the maximum acceptable concentration that we have at the moment.

I'm not suggesting that this committee study the health effects, but I think we could probably hear some testimony to reaffirm the seriousness of the situation. My hoped-for outcome for this study would be that the committee call in expert witnesses to provide a report to the House containing a list of current best practices across Canada for removing lead lines and treating drinking water; recommendations on how best practices could be expanded; recommendations for how the federal government could play a role in the process, such as by creating awareness and advocacy programs for the dangers of lead consumption; utilizing current funding programs or creating new ones; and working with its provincial, territorial, municipal, and indigenous partners to create a national strategy for combatting lead in drinking water.

That's the basis of my private member's bill, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bratina. We appreciate very much your bringing this issue to our committee's attention.

Our first questioner is Mr. Rayes, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Bratina, thank you for having come to present your bill to the committee.

I would first like to ask you which groups and stakeholders you consulted to prepare your bill.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Bratina: I honestly would have to say that most of the consultation took place in the 10 years that I was on city council. A lot of consultation took place at that time. Subsequent to that, McMaster University did a special and very exhaustive program for the City of Hamilton. I consulted with McMaster University on the basis of the information they brought forward, which was a very comprehensive review of strategies throughout the country and proposals for the City of Hamilton.

To answer your question, a lot of this consultation took place previously, but as a result of that, I revisited some of those experts. I talked to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and they were of course interested in moving forward. I think they would want to hear from the committee on what specific roles and specific questions the committee might ask of them to move this issue forward.

The Canadian Water Quality Association is another group that we consulted with. They have done extensive work in this area.

In fact, we have a number of organizations that are prepared to come forward, including the City of Hamilton's finance department and public works department, which could give testimony. I asked them about this a month or so ago in regard to how well the plan is working and whether evidence could be brought forward to a committee.

That's a general overview of the consultation I had.

●(1115)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Before I ask my next question, I'd like to make this comment. I was so excited at the idea of asking my question that I forgot to mention that we have in our audience several master's students from the École nationale d'administration publique, the ENAP, in Quebec. Professor Rémy Trudel is accompanying them. They are going to be spending the first hour here with us to see how things are done. I just wanted to let you know who these people are. I thank them for being here with us.

I will ask my question immediately. The students will be able to see that we have a short period of time to ask our questions.

This issue is very close to municipalities, since the buildings and service lines are directly on their territory. Some of them have already started to put certain programs into effect.

Why do you think the federal government should play a role in this change, which is quite considerable, and will likely also be quite costly?

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: My review of the situation occurred because of the crisis in Flint, Michigan, and then the subsequent refusal by the City of Toronto to accept a very useful and workable loan program.

The problem became obvious to me as I began to do a simple Google search: "Canada lead drinking water". Month after month through this past year, I came up with cities across Canada—Brandon, Manitoba, and Kamloops, British Columbia, and so on—that are discovering what we found 10 years ago in Hamilton and worked very quickly and efficiently to address.

It's obvious that there's no coherent management of what many experts consider a crisis, that is, the exposure of young children to lead in their drinking water, especially those in marginal circumstances, such as families who have to rent older premises, for instance, premises likely built before 1975 for sure. Many in our older cities were built in the late 19th century and early 20th century.

These people were unwittingly exposing their children to a lifetime of diminished expectations. The other thing that has happened over the past five years since our Hamilton experience took place is some very intensive research into exactly how this lead is affecting the brains of these young children. I took that all in a bundle.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: How much speaking time do I have left?

[English]

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Bratina, I hear what you are saying very clearly. Municipal water lines allow the water to reach all of the homes and buildings. Perhaps you will have the opportunity of speaking to other stakeholders, since my time will soon be up, but I'd like to know why, in your opinion, the federal government should infringe on jurisdictions that are to me of a municipal nature.

In order for this aspect to be prioritized, certain conditions would have to be imposed on the sums to be transferred, for example, through the fuel tax. I think there are already conditions related to water quality in the municipalities that want to use money from that program.

I'm convinced you will be able to answer that question, directly or indirectly.

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: Are the municipalities using the resources made available to them to address the issue? In the City of Toronto, on the private side, they decided they weren't going to provide any assistance.

The other problem is that if the city tears out an old lead line, a main trunk line, that was installed in 1940 or something, now you have a new pipe. With the lead lines previously connected to the city pipe, there may have been less leaching of that lead because of the nature of the construction and the quality of the water. Once you change part of it, however, it may create chemical reactions that actually put in more lead, and now the thing you did with the federal

money is affecting the health of a private individual. I think we need to work through this.

• (1120)

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

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Bratina, one would be led to believe through your testimony that the real issue here is the connection between the main water main and the house, that this is where the problem will primarily exist. Is that your take on it?

Mr. Bob Bratina: It's a complicated situation. In Flint, Michigan, there were no major problems until they changed the source of the water. The chemistry of that water released lead that was captured for years in old infrastructure.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay.

Mr. Bob Bratina: You can't simply say that if you take that lead pipe out from the household it's going to fix the problem. It's more complex.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Now, lead in drinking water pipes has been banned in the United States since the 1930s. That doesn't preclude, though, some very old homes, heritage homes, that maybe very rich people buy. What about the notion of the lead pipe inside the house itself? Do we have any notion of how big an issue this is?

Mr. Bob Bratina: What you're getting at is really that we need to test the water at the tap to ensure that especially babies being bottle fed are not ingesting high amounts of lead. The tap is connected to pipes within maybe an old house from the 1930s, as you said. Just because you took the lead line out doesn't mean that all of the lead potential is gone. That's a good point.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I get that, yes. The other point is, how large a presence of lead in the water system is required to lead to adverse consequences or exceedances, to use the term you've used? They were using lead in the solder for copper piping up until the 1980s when they stopped doing that. You and I are almost old enough to remember leaded gasoline in cars, and there were excessive lead levels because of that. There were many different sources in the past where lead could be present.

If we turn this on its head, we can start looking at what we can do about it. You've talked about the City of Hamilton's initiative to provide loans to people to replace, at the very least, the service to the house. If we're inside a house, though, and there's lead piping there or even an excess of lead solder, that's a whole other issue. If you were sitting in our shoes making recommendations, would you want to see the presence of a lead service pipe or lead piping disclosed on a real estate listing so that people would know they are buying a house with this potential problem? Or would you ask, for instance, the home inspection business to test the water in the house and report the result to the would-be buyer?

Mr. Bob Bratina: It's an interesting question whether it should be regulated to that extent. I'd probably say yes. I went through the urea formaldehyde question back in the day, and that's a whole other story that relates to who's responsible. In that case, the government suggested you should put this in and then said you better take it out. Remember, there are federal regulations on lead pipes and solder, and so it's almost like a recall where we admit we made a mistake in 1986 and 1970.

It really has to do with the quality of the water coming out of the tap. If it's efficacious to take the lead pipe out at a reasonable cost and with a loan program, that's fine. If it's not, filtering the water and alternate water sources would be options. But I think it behooves the federal government to pull all this information together, because it's not any different in Kamloops than it is in St. John's, Newfoundland.

• (1125)

Mr. Ken Hardie: I submit that we might also be looking at issues with copper piping. Depending on who you talk to, there could be issues there. Even PVC piping is cited by some as having the potential to give off nasty things into the water.

A lot of it will depend on the chemistry of the actual water being supplied to the communities. It's almost as though we need to take it on a community-by-community basis rather than necessarily looking at a one-size-fits-all remedy.

Mr. Bob Bratina: I would disagree. As I said, St. John's, Newfoundland and Kamloops, B.C., it's the same problem across the country. In many cases, cities don't even have inventories of their own main trunk lines, never mind the household lead lines that are there.

I'm honing in on lead, specifically, because I dealt with it in Hamilton and I know exactly the problems that can be created, especially the irreversible damage done to the developing child's brain. We can't just say, "Well, let's just leave it up to the communities, and let them go to the library and see what the latest news is." In Flint, Michigan, the U.S. government is facing a class action suit because of this: "Well, why didn't you tell us?"

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Bratina, thank you for being here with us this morning.

I would first say that you have not said very much to convince me of the relevance of the issue you are defending. I had the opportunity of speaking on this during the first hour of debate in the House. However, I would like you to explain why it would be relevant for the committee to undertake a more exhaustive study of this issue.

If I may I would like to compare your motion and the text of the amended motion. The first motion reads as follows:

[...] the government should address the growing concerns of lead pipes and water quality [...] to advocate and establish possible solutions to these issues [...]

That wording really gave me the impression that we would initiate some action. But for reasons that escape me, the wording was amended by the parliamentary secretary of the Government House Leader, and now reads as follows:

[...] the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities should undertake a study [...] to discuss options for addressing lead drinking water service lines [...]

We are very far here from the action verbs in the first motion. There is a certain overlap in some things, such as the idea of a study on the presence of lead, and the efforts made by governments.

What I understand from the amended version, in short, is that we are now talking about doing an inventory rather than a real study to find solutions to the problems you have raised.

Do you think it is relevant to use the resources of the committee to draw up an inventory? That inventory could be done by a researcher or even by an employee of the Library of Parliament, and then the committee could examine potential solutions.

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: I appreciate your comments.

I would have preferred the original, unamended motion, but this is not a matter anymore of gathering information, inventories of... Somebody is going to have to do that, but that's not what I see as the resources of this committee in addressing this problem.

First of all, because I brought the motion forward—whether it's happenstance or serendipity—Health Canada is reviewing the maximum acceptable concentration now, looking to cut it by half.

Last night, I was sitting after a busy day of attending other conversations about this subject, and Peter Mansbridge on *The National* said that next week they're going to look at the Flint lead drinking water situation, a special study by the CBC. It's very topical.

I think the most power this committee will have is not expending a lot of resources over many months of testimony, but highlighting the fact that it is an issue that is affecting young, newborn children, especially poorer people, all across the country.

Not only did the CBC pick up on this, but Arizona State University's school of journalism—our student friends may be interested in this because it's called the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism—decided that the biggest story on an environmental issue that they could take for the students to dig into was drinking water, as a result of Flint.

That school extended an invitation, and other schools that will be participating are Dublin City University in Ireland, George Washington University in south California, Louisiana State, Syracuse, Alabama, Oklahoma, and the University of British Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. All these young people are going to be examining the problem of lead in municipal water supplies.

There is a very simple task, I think, that this committee has: to see whether the funding that is being made available to communities with regard to their infrastructure is being applied in a focused way to assist communities and households in solving this problem.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

You have almost answered my second question, but I want to see if I understood.

Listening to you, I have the impression that the federal level is probably the level of government that lags the furthest behind in understanding this issue and that the provinces, if not the municipalities, already have the expertise.

Should we not ensure that this folds into the subsidies granted for infrastructure projects, so that these projects would be eligible for federal funding?

[English]

Mr. Bob Bratina: It's a good point, and I think it's a conversation that the committee can have in a simple, efficient, and fast way to get at the question whether resources are adequate and whether they're properly placed provincially and municipally.

The provinces have frankly let me down, when a medical officer of health is saying, "Let's just keep an eye on the situation" and "Go see your doctor." The evidence is so strong of the dangers to certain people.

I've had people say to me, "I grew up in a house with lead pipes and I'm fine."

I say, "Maybe. Did your mother breastfeed you?", because it's baby formula with leaded water that is a very high ingestive point of this neurotoxin.

On the other hand, although you may be smart, perhaps you might have been a genius. It's like people saying, "I smoke and I didn't get sick, so let's just forget about the anti-smoking stuff." There's a real problem; it's going to affect children for their entire lives. There's so much research.

The top research on this is from Simon Fraser University, by an American who came from Cincinnati who did studies that found that incarcerated people in the Ohio state penal system had exceedances of lead in their blood and the behaviours that are caused by changes to the prefrontal lobe of the brain, where all of the humanity of a person sits. We can't just say, "They should know about it."

I think this committee could very quickly bring the right attention and seek the funding available or that otherwise should be created to address this. I would hate to leave my opportunity as a member of Parliament without having asked my colleagues to take a look at this and see what we can do about it.

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

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here.

By way of background, you kicked off your remarks with a statement about the EPA and its knowledge of the scope of the problem in the U.S. Do we know whether the scope of the problem

in Canada is similar to that in the U.S., or are we wanting information right now?

Mr. Bob Bratina: I haven't seen the problem phrased in the way I state it, that it's the number one environmental health issue for children under the age of six. Health Canada explicitly states that there is no safe level of lead in a child's blood, and there's plenty of information on the Health Canada sites as to what people should be worried about, especially with regard to developing children. It's all out there, then, but it's being phrased in different ways. I wanted to use the very dramatic statement by the U.S. government to kick this off, and I doubt whether Health Canada would argue—and the World Health Organization, and the Centers for Disease Control. All the leading authorities are on this subject.

Is the Government of Canada? That's my question.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Do you know whether any kind of analysis has been conducted within Canada already that demonstrates the social or economic impact of this problem? You said that in B.C., I think it was, at a population level no detrimental effects have been observed, but common sense would suggest that at the individual level such effects could happen.

Mr. Bob Bratina: What we know is that, as referred to earlier by Mr. Hardie, in the old days of leaded gasoline.... I can remember when my dad filled the car up, because I am old enough, I loved that smell. It probably affected me, so all of my shortcomings I'm blaming on leaded gasoline.

What we know, however, is that the graph of blood lead levels in North America from the 1970s to now shows them to have gone down dramatically. If you want to say, "It's gone down dramatically, so why are we here today?", the fact is that for certain population cohorts, especially the newborn, there's a completely opposite graph developing.

What bothers one is that you can get certain sorts of diseases or you can fall and break your arm, but once the prefrontal lobe of the brain is diminished in size, it stays that way, because lead fools it into thinking it's something good. It's not, and it screws up the way the brain develops, and that's the end of it.

If you want to say, "It's only children at age one, so how many of them are there in Canada, and is this a problem we should be dealing with?", I would say yes, it is.

• (1135)

Mr. Sean Fraser: I find it very curious that there wouldn't have been a population-level impact observed, if somebody ever looked at that. Do you know if there has ever been a controlled study that examined the difference in a community with lower lead levels in their blood, for example, and the impact that it has actually had on a community?

Mr. Bob Bratina: When I said to the city, "Okay, you don't want to spend money on doing lead tests. Let's check the kids' blood lead levels", apparently that was a study that hadn't been done in at least 25 years. This was groundbreaking. This study is quoted in the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control, the Hamilton study said this and that.

The answer is no, there hasn't been one, to my knowledge.

Mr. Sean Fraser: One of the issues I see coming up for rural communities, like the one I grew up in.... Everybody who lived within 50 miles of us had their own well. There was no municipal water infrastructure. Do you think the nature of the problem would be strikingly different between rural areas and urban communities?

Mr. Bob Bratina: That's another interesting point. In Hamilton, we have some rural communities, because it's an amalgamated city. Lynden is on its own town well. It was found to have lead exceedances, and boil water advisories were put out. That's a well for a small community, but as far as individual wells are concerned, what this would call for is for people living in those communities to get a test on their water to see if there is a potential for lead exceedances, and then deal with it. You rip the pipes out, put a filter on, get a big water jug, or whatever. It has to be brought into the public awareness, and hopefully it will be, as a result of this.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'm curious as to why this committee would be best positioned to tackle this issue, as opposed to, say, the departments of health and infrastructure working in partnership. Do you have a suggestion as to why this is the right body to deal with it?

Mr. Bob Bratina: It's not a health issue anymore for me, for the Centers for Disease Control, or for Health Canada. It's not an issue. We don't have it. It's bad—please. So what do you get to? You get to infrastructure. Where is the lead coming into these homes? It's through the infrastructure. What's the infrastructure committee able to do about it? Well, we're not sure. It's a municipal issue, for the most part, but it was federally regulated at one time, and there is federal money available to fix infrastructure. Can we marry the two and come out with a program where we can say, as parliamentarians, that there is a problem in our country and we invite municipalities, provinces, and so on to access federal funds in a meaningful way? The loan program is phenomenal, in the Hamilton experience, because we do 500 to 1,000 lead pipe removals a year, and the money gets paid back. It will take 25 years, but we'll eventually get them all, if we want to. Why wouldn't we do that?

• (1140)

Mr. Sean Fraser: It's a loan program—

The Chair: Mr. Fraser, I'm sorry, but the time is up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Chair, like my colleague Alain Rayes earlier, I would like to greet Mr. Trudel and the master's students from ENAP. Some of them live in my riding, and I thank them for being here today.

Dear colleague, my objective is not to say that your motion is not important; on the contrary, it is very important. I wonder, however, how we will be able to deal with this request concerning lead in drinking water, since it does not fall under federal jurisdiction. Just like Quebec, all the provinces have jurisdiction in this area. So how are we going to oblige a province such as Quebec to respect the results of our study?

Secondly, I would like to go back to something you said in English.

[*English*]

Expand on that “simple task”. What exactly is the simple task that you want this committee to focus on? We know it's of medical concern. We understand that, but how can we zero in? How can we come out and have a better understanding of the scope so we know what to challenge and what to dedicate our study to? I have to admit, it's very large, so we need to narrow it down. What exactly do you wish this committee to pay attention to?

Mr. Bob Bratina: I would like the committee to look at two things. One is the potential for class action lawsuits, such as is happening right now in Flint, Michigan, due to the indifference or inactivity, inadequacies of the United States government's Environmental Protection Agency.

First of all, we're considering what role we have, but in the exact specifics of what you're talking about, the City of Toronto decided not to accept the staff recommendation of creating a fund. Because we have infrastructure money made available, I would think the committee could consider ways that the government could allow a municipality to draw on those funds, to create a revolving loan fund, which wouldn't impact on their revenue, let's say, on a smaller community or even a larger one, like Toronto. If they were concerned about fraud or fiascos, and so on, there could perhaps be a guarantee, a backstop from the federal government saying if Toronto put a loan program in place, the federal government would certainly make sure that it functioned well.

I'm not sure of the direct answer to that, but money is available. Generally, as far as I know, communities have not been focusing their efforts on using that money to address this problem. Perhaps this infrastructure committee could resolve that or there may be a recommendation that we can't find a way to do that, but I would not want to, once again, leave my few days that I have in Parliament saying that's somebody else's problem, knowing what I know through the Hamilton experience and observing problems all across the country.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

The Chair: I understand you'd like to share your time with Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Bratina, for attending today. I want to ask you a couple of questions on the program you initiated in Hamilton.

Did you have much default on the program?

Mr. Bob Bratina: No.

Mr. Neil Ellis: Not at all.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Zero is what I was told by our finance department.

Mr. Neil Ellis: You're saying 500 homes a year. The program has been in effect for...?

Mr. Bob Bratina: We've been in effect since 2010 or—I wasn't mayor yet when I got that program in, so yes.

Mr. Neil Ellis: Did ever had a boil water advisory as a mayor?

Mr. Bob Bratina: Yes, in Lynden, which is a rural community.

Mr. Neil Ellis: I had three. They're not fun.

Having said that, are you familiar with the Ontario source water protection that was initiated to municipalities that allowed resources for not only—I guess not municipalities, but for homes to secure their source or septic close to wells, close to where you draw your source from as a municipality, to go in and clean up our own outlier problems that we had and identify them?

I look at that role as municipal leaders. It was a five-year committee, and I believe it stretched to six years, seven years, and it's still sitting, but we as municipalities have a lot on our plates. I know you, as mayor, 66% of the services you provide...and you look at your water plants, you look at blue-green algae coming at us, and you look at this. There is lots on a municipality's back, so I commend you in being the face behind this.

You could look at this and say it's a municipal or provincial issue, but as leaders, it's a Canadian issue for older municipalities. I was a mayor of an older municipality; this does scare me. I know a lot of newer municipalities...and I think the Ontario building code was taken out in that range, maybe in 1975.

Do you have any idea of the percentage of houses in Hamilton that have lead contamination or lead in their property lines?

• (1145)

Mr. Bob Bratina: No. On the source water thing, although I am of course aware of it, I wasn't interested in source water with regard to this. I was concerned about the water coming out of the tap. Funnily enough, though, if lead accumulates within the household and it goes through the household and becomes an effluent, then it might become a federal issue, but I doubt very much that enough lead is being discharged into Lake Ontario that it's going to have that effect.

Mr. Neil Ellis: No, and—

Mr. Bob Bratina: But it has to be looked at, and that's a federal regulation responsibility.

Mr. Neil Ellis: I guess what I look at—

The Chair: Mr. Ellis, your time is up. Sorry about that.

Mr. Rayes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to go back to the questions I asked earlier. I think we all agree on the importance of this dossier which relates to public health. That said, I am still trying to determine what we could do. You are a Liberal member. This issue affects municipalities and provinces. In fact, in Quebec, all of the data has been compiled. The issue here is the quality of water. Like me, some members here were once mayors. Our objective is to provide a good quality of life to citizens. We are directly responsible for that. If we do not do that, we will be held publicly responsible and citizens will make a decision subsequently.

This involves service lines that belong to municipalities, and pipes that are on residents' land, and so are private property. We are talking

either about residents, or the owners of private buildings. The government has launched an ambitious infrastructure program. All it has to do is include its conditions with transfer payments to the provinces. I am still trying to see what the committee can do to help things go forward.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities does not seem to want to make this a priority. It is in contact with the representatives of municipalities everywhere. If this were an urgent issue for it, it would be the first to act. I imagine that we will hear from lawyers tomorrow morning regarding class action suits against locations that are aware of the problem but are doing nothing to support their citizens.

Could you tell me what you expect from us that your government cannot already do in the context of its next budget, which it will table in three weeks?

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Bratina: I have to go back to your preamble. Your preamble is not really correct, because this is an issue that is in many minds an old issue from days gone by. We have other problems now; we have new problems.

What I've been telling you, and I'll repeat it, is that there has been new information over the last five to 10 years of the devastating effects on the developing brains of children.

In my case, I had to fight to get the public works department to address the issue in a broader way:

“Well, here's what the province said, and that's all we're doing”.

“Well, let's do more.”

“Well I don't want to spend the money on that.”

“Okay, let's check the blood lead levels then.”

And so, one thing after another. Now I'm reading that in other parts of Canada, medical officers of health are saying, “Well, we'll keep an eye on it.”

I guarantee you that—depending on how this matter is dealt with in the national media, such as the feature that I understand is coming forward on *The National* next week, which I saw advertised last night—it'll change the perspective on this.

The FCM has tons of problems before them. I think what we need to do is ask them how they think they can incorporate our values into their organization.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: I will reformulate the question.

I think we all agree with what you have been saying, with the facts. No one is challenging them. That said, the research done by my team indicates that a fair number of municipalities that are aware of the issue have already begun to act. Others are recalcitrant or delinquent; I don't know what term one should use in this case. The buildings, for instance the schools, fall under provincial jurisdiction. The provinces also build the hospitals. The municipal service lines are paid for through government programs. I am still trying to see what more we can do, aside from what the Liberal government can do, as it has an ambitious infrastructure program.

I would tend to advise you to go and see the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities to suggest that they impose conditions or launch an awareness program through Health Canada in order to apprise all municipalities of this problem. They are in a position to let them know that they have work to do. This remains a matter of provincial and municipal jurisdiction. We simply need to find a way of informing these people.

Can you tell me clearly what you expect from the committee, so that I may promote it, so that a study can be done and so that you can move this forward?

For the time being, I am still trying to understand.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Bratina: If you did conduct a study, the study would bring recommendations to the federal government, which would bring awareness. I'm not exactly sure how you can fine-tune the infrastructure programs to address this problem specifically, but I would think that in your conversations, you could come up with a resolution one way or another on that.

Also, and I said this earlier, if you take the old lead pipe out but leave the lead service lines connected, you have a worse situation than you did when you started. Depending on water chemistry, an old lead main line and lead service pipes may not introduce that much lead into a household, but if you change the water chemistry, if you change this pipe to another pipe, and then you have lead...and then you change something again. So who's to coordinate it? Is that something that's different in St. John's, Newfoundland and Kamloops, B.C.? I don't think it is.

This government may eventually face the same problem that the U.S. federal government is facing in Flint, which is class action. Did nobody think about this? Does nobody care about this? What do we do about this?

We hear that, "Well, it's the municipalities." I can't accept that. I think there is a role for this committee to play, because what I'm talking about is infrastructure problems in Canadian municipalities, and there's money available. How does it get directed there? I don't know. I'd like to see it, but smarter heads than mine will have to determine that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Neil Ellis: This goes back to the Ontario program that was at the source. I look at what you're saying here. I look at testing at the taps not as a municipal problem but as a Canadian problem, because

I think it's safe to say that every province is affected by this and it's a matter of bringing it into the limelight.

It goes back to whether we as leaders gate this down the road. I know you are probably not going to take no for an answer, but that being said, a federal program in leadership would be better than what we have now, let alone funding....

I commend you for bringing this here today.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thanks.

Mr. Neil Ellis: When you look at municipalities and their systems, how much lead do you think is in the ground that municipalities own?

Mr. Bob Bratina: I think there's quite a bit.

Mr. Neil Ellis: Most municipalities don't even know their water sources. That's how long ago they were built, and they were not mapped. I know we still have some wooden pipes. I know municipalities are tested weekly or twice weekly, so we stress in Ontario that water must be safe, but we forget the end source coming out of the tap.

I support what you're saying here today. It shows leadership. Thanks for coming.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Thank you so much. It is a complicated problem. I didn't expect to come here and have a sudden agreement and say, "Of course. All we have to do is this and that will get that fixed." But I'm concerned about a mother coming home with a newborn baby, turning on the tap to mix formula, and unwittingly diminishing the growth of the child's brain because we didn't do much about it, if anything.

Health Canada has looked at this and is looking at reducing what's called the MAC, the maximum acceptable concentration, from the current number to half that number. That's based on the research that Bruce Lanphear at Simon Fraser University and others have done, which says that we have a bigger problem than we thought. As I said, it's gone down. For the general population, lead is not a big problem, but for a newborn baby in a poor home, that's a problem.

● (1155)

The Chair: Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: A little earlier, Mr. Bratina, we talked about the idea of maybe disclosing the presence of lead piping on real estate listings, etc. Do you have any other thoughts seeing as you have lived with this? Are there any other recommendations that you would like to write for us at this moment?

Mr. Bob Bratina: What I would offer is to hear testimony from the City of Hamilton. There was a great article, after I left the mayor's office, about a guy buying a house, his first house. He had a newborn baby. He went to the city's website and said, "Oh, lead. Free test." The city came over to test his house and told him that he had lead. He thought, oh, my gosh, what am I going to do? The city said, "Well, we have a loan program, you can take the pipe out and board over it. Or, you could have a filter on your pipe."

That situation is easily occurring in Hamilton. If somebody with a young child goes to the city's website, they can get this information. That's not happening in many communities across the country. Why not? Why 10 years later are people waking up to find out that there is a lead problem in their households and wondering what they are going to do about it? Health officials are saying that they will just monitor the situation, and generally speaking the population is okay. I'm repeating what I said earlier, but it's the same point.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I gather that probably the key recommendation that could come out of this exercise is to really just simply raise the profile of this issue across the country. Municipalities, with the gas tax funding, can basically choose what they use that money for, so it becomes a matter of prioritization. The prioritization will certainly flow from the public's reaction to the nature of the problem in their community, one would think.

Mr. Bob Bratina: I think we're mandated to protect the public and to make the public aware. You certainly need to tell them that there's a problem they may not be aware of. They didn't know about in Surrey, in all these schools. One of the teachers' rooms or staff rooms had six times the lead content.

I could go back in history to the Franklin expedition and what seems to be an exceedances of lead in their drinking water, not through the tin cans that they were using, but through the desalinating system for the steam boiler that was on board that ship. It all went through lead pipes, and the chef used that same water to cook all their meals in. They wandered around the Arctic half-crazed with huge amounts of lead in their systems.

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

Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I just have a question for you before you adjourn the meeting. My I ask it?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: In your opening remarks, you mentioned that our second hour was going to be held in camera, and I was wondering why. We are not debating a specific report; there is nothing sensitive. In any case, two weeks ago we held our conversations in public and to my knowledge this did not create any major incidents. In addition, this morning since we have guests who are ENAP students it would be interesting for them if we allowed them to be present also for these debates among political parties. In that way, they could see that conciliation is possible.

And so I propose that the second hour be held in public, if possible.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur Aubin. In order to do that, I need a motion to not go into private session and to stay in public session for the upcoming hour of committee business. Are you prepared to move that motion?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I will give that to you right now.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Rayes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: I simply want to say...

[English]

The Chair: It's not debatable.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: In fact, I am not against what he said, but I simply want to add that the students and the professor have to leave us. I don't know if the member made that request to be nice to them, but they are going to the parliamentary restaurant and have another meeting afterwards. I am not impugning the intention behind the request. I just wanted you to know why they would be leaving.

• (1200)

Mr. Robert Aubin: No, but they could follow us through the recording.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes. This does not detract from the importance of the motion.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: My motion is very simple, Madam Chair; I move that the work of the committee be discussed in public.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Professor Trudel, thank you very much for coming. I had acknowledged you at the beginning, and then you were acknowledged again by Mr. Rayes and Mr. Iacono. Clearly, they were very pleased to see you here with your students. Good luck. I think you've heard a very important issue. It's just one sample of what we deal with at this committee.

[Translation]

Have a good day.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

[English]

The Chair: The meeting has been reconvened.

The first item for us to discuss with the committee is Mr. Bratina's motion and what the thoughts of the committee are concerning our next direction with it. I think he has flagged an important issue that especially our former mayors at the table and the rest of us are interested in. The question becomes just what we can do, given that we have a heavy agenda ahead of us.

If we were to go into an in-depth study, we could be doing this for a year, but I'm not sure that's what Mr. Bratina is asking for. I think he's asking for some attention specifically to be paid to this issue, to raise, as Mr. Rayes and Mr. Fraser said, the awareness of the issue—it seems that many people know it's an issue—and then to get the municipalities to figure out, together with the federal government possibly, how to deal with the subject.

Who would like to speak to this issue first?

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I think the approach is that everybody recognizes this is very important, but that there are many things the federal government can't control. I think it's prudent for us to do something on this. I don't think an exhaustive study that covers all the ins and outs of the public health concerns and every municipal issue is really the right vehicle for us to get into. I'd suggest having maybe a couple of meetings to prop this up and then making a few recommendations as to the direction the federal government might want to take.

I think, then, that a shorter study that puts us on the radar and gets some momentum going might be appropriate.

The Chair: Mr. Hardie is next, and then Ms. Block.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I would agree with Mr. Fraser's analysis. As this issue will undoubtedly get more profile, particularly with the CBC's examination of Flint, which Mr. Bratina says is coming up, we have an opportunity to basically show some leadership, to go to the people who are most in the position to act on this and give them an opportunity to tell everybody what they intend to do, in the interests of public confidence in the process more than anything.

I support having a couple of meetings, calling in the FCM or maybe one or two municipalities that have had some experience dealing with this—Hamilton is certainly notable—and let that stand as the flag that the country has to pay attention to going forward.

The Chair: Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Madam Chair, I continue to remain unconvinced that this is the right table at which to have an in-depth study on Mr. Bratina's motion, particularly in light of the fact that, as a natural resource, water and the use and management of that resource fall under the jurisdiction of the provinces and the municipalities when it comes to infrastructure.

I think Mr. Hardie rightly pointed out that municipalities set their priorities. They have the gas tax and the latitude to use it towards whatever infrastructure needs they feel are the most important.

Finally, if we're talking about the health risks that this is posing to the population, and that was certainly quite an important part of Mr. Bratina's position on this issue, I think a recommendation that the Standing Committee on Health take a look at this subject and perhaps champion the issue from that perspective would be appropriate.

I'm not convinced that we as federal legislators have the authority to direct municipalities in relation to where they should or shouldn't turn their attention concerning infrastructure projects.

• (1210)

The Chair: Is there some further comment?

Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): I want to support my colleague's comments. I was one of the first to discuss this in the House and to support Mr. Bratina's motion. I too think there is a problem. I was once a mayor, and my municipality had to deal with the issue of lead in drinking water. The issue was raised, and we solved part of the problem.

At this time, the government has an opportunity to make the required amounts eligible. I don't see what other recommendation our committee could make that would really change anything in the short or medium term. I do not believe that our committee studying this motion further would contribute much to attaining Mr. Bratina's objective.

Mr. Bratina says he is very worried about the health of young mothers and children who are consuming lead in drinking water. The federal government could intervene to change things and force municipalities and provinces to act in the health area. This would advance Mr. Bratina's cause considerably.

I believe I understood that he wanted to make this his cause before he concludes his term in Parliament. It is a good thing when members invest in a cause and want to change things to improve our society, especially when it concerns people's health. I think we could help Mr. Bratina more if we recommended that the Standing Committee on Health examine the health impacts of lead in drinking water. That committee could then intervene and bring in some regulations, so that the municipalities and provinces would have to do something, which our committee cannot do currently.

I agree with Ms. Block on this. I want to help Mr. Bratina, I fully approve of what he is doing, but we simply have to help him find the right path to attain the objective in his motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Rayes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: I agree with what other members have said.

I don't know how we should proceed, but I suggest that we provide the member with a written reply in which we say that we are sensitive to the problem, that we are fully aware of it, and that in order to help him we recommend that the question be referred to the Standing Committee on Health. Indeed, that committee will be in a better position than we are to make the necessary recommendations to the government. We would also recommend that he continue his awareness-raising work with the various departments. This will give Mr. Bratina the additional tools he needs to continue his work.

Our committee is aware of the problem. We do not deny it at all, quite the opposite. However, we think that this is a matter of health, first and foremost. In fact, whenever we asked him what we could do, he always brought us back to issues involving people's health. I felt that he was one of those people who are aware of the problem and its consequences on children and human beings, but who feel somewhat powerless. This really is a health issue.

For the rest, honestly, it is up to the government to decide if it wants to invest and include criteria in its programs, as it did for the fuel tax. As I said earlier, for those who don't know, the municipalities in Quebec have to use the funds collected through the fuel tax to resolve water quality issues first. If they do not do that, they cannot use the money for other purposes. They have to make that a priority under the agreement negotiated between the federal government and the province.

On the Quebec Department of Environment website, you can see all of the work that has been done on this, and to encourage the municipalities to correct things quickly. Perhaps we could refer to that.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Madam Chair, I don't yet know how we are going to answer Mr. Bratina, but I agree with my colleagues who spoke before me, and I'm not going to repeat what they said.

I have a concern about consistency. That our committee reply to Mr. Bratina with a suggestion is one thing, but that our committee suggest to the Standing Committee on Health that it do a study is another. We would be dealing with prerogatives we have already discussed on other topics. I would like us to avoid that, so that all committees maintain their autonomy. That includes ours, of course.

•(1215)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Just to offer a counterpoint to the issue about this being public health, I think we all recognize it is a public health issue, but I think Mr. Bratina's perspective is that the health aspect is not what he wants to do something about. He's not advocating that we do research to see the scope of the health problem. He's bought into the fact that research shows that lead can impact the developing brain, and he's sold on that. I think where he would like us to focus is on where the fix is. I had some of the same reservations, and I still do, which is why I don't want to get into a really lengthy study on this, but there might be something to discuss with FCM, for example, about how infrastructure funds could be delivered, whether the gas tax is the right way to go, and whether there are advocacy efforts that we could be doing.

There are just two areas that come to mind for me where there's some utility in doing a study, and it's really on the advocacy and awareness piece and on the delivery of infrastructure funding that could be used for this project. My inclination is to go forward with a short study that kicks off the discussion on this issue.

The Chair: You say a short study. Are you talking two meetings?

Mr. Sean Fraser: I think two meetings would be an appropriate place to start, and we may very well find that two meetings are plenty for what we need to do, but I'd recommend we start with two meetings for this study.

The Chair: Are there any other further speakers on this?

The suggestion on the table right now is that we allocate two meetings to this. Mr. Hardie has suggested inviting FCM in for one of the meetings and possibly a municipality that has dealt with it.

Mr. Sean Fraser: It wouldn't hurt to have some Infrastructure Canada officials to talk about the opportunities for the delivery of funds.

The Chair: Okay, those are the suggestions.

I have Mr. Aubin first and then Mr. Hardie.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I have a lot of trouble imagining undertaking such a study here. If we ever managed to do that and convened the FCM, I would like us to invite their Quebec counterparts, the UMQ or the FQM, either one.

That said, the committee would be asking people to travel here to come to tell us that this is already included in municipal priorities. I don't think this would be the best use of our resources in Ottawa, nor of our partners' resources. Why would we want the UMQ to come to the witness table to tell us that the problem is already well in hand in Quebec? We already know that. It seems to me that we would be asking these people to travel for nothing, because we will be putting questions to them to which we already have the answers.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'll pass, thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Berthold.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I support my colleague's remarks. Our study could instead attempt to determine which persons within the federal government are in a position to intervene. I would prefer that we know who has the power to act. For instance, are there people in the Department of Health who could do something? All of this would help to properly orient the study.

In the House, the motion to conduct this study was accepted unanimously by the members. We all voted in favour of motion M-69, which states that we are to undertake a study. We simply want to determine how to do that. That is important, and we all agree.

However, rather than hearing municipal spokespersons tell us what we already know, why don't we target federal representatives who can really intervene in this file, whether they are with the Department of the Environment or with public health? These people could tell us whether they can act in such or such an area. I think that would be the best way to move Mr. Bratina's motion forward.

[English]

The Chair: That's a good point.

Mr. Fraser.

• (1220)

Mr. Sean Fraser: I think I'm a bit guilty of putting the cart before the horse by kicking off a discussion about witnesses that we don't need to have today. If I haven't officially moved it, I'd like to move now that we conduct a two-meeting study on the issue of the presence of lead in water. I think we should borrow the wording from the motion, but it's essentially that we conduct a two-meeting study on the motion that Mr. Bratina presented.

The Chair: Exactly. I think what we've heard here is let's try and stay focused on the federal side. Maybe we have some folks from the Department of Health come for one hour, and Infrastructure Canada for the second hour, and that may give us enough information to be able to go forward with our recommendation.

Mr. Sikand, did you want to make a comment?

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): No, I thought you were going to put forward the motion.

The Chair: Okay, I'm sorry about that.

Mr. Rayes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Would it be possible to keep it to one meeting initially? Then, if need be, we could schedule another. If we wanted to conduct a serious study, as the chair pointed out, it could go on for a year. We want to help the member make progress on the issue. It seems to me that we could hold a first meeting, and then figure out whether a second is necessary, whether we could take it further.

I'd also like to discuss the types of witnesses we would want to bring in to help us make the decision.

Personally, I don't think this is for the committee to deal with. I think that it's in the government's hands, that the government could take the necessary steps. If, however, we absolutely have to have these meetings, I will get on board. That said, we have many other issues in the mix right now, files in which we can have a real impact. I say let's start with one meeting and go from there in terms of how best to proceed.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I don't think Mr. Fraser put the cart before the horse; he simply has a holistic view of the horse and the cart. As I see it, if we can already agree on a list of government witnesses we would like to hear from, we'll know whether we need one or two meetings, and we can wrap up the discussion.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. I think we should just go forward with one meeting and assess at the end of that who else we need to hear from. That is my suggestion. Is that all right?

If we need a second meeting, or a third, then the flexibility is here within the committee to do so if the committee members decide that they've heard other information that requires additional meetings.

Otherwise, we're all on the same page on this issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Does that work for you, Mr. Fraser?

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser: It's fine.

If we can get started and adjust our game plan if necessary, that's fine. The key to me is that we should do something. To get the ball rolling with a meeting is fine by me. If we decide after that meeting that we need more, I'm okay with that.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Would agreement on holding one to two meetings on the topic make it the next item on our agenda, or could we study it when appropriate?

[English]

The Chair: No, because it will have to fit in with all of the other things we have on our agenda.

When we come back we'll be dealing with the NPA study. We'll have to fit this in when we can, because we have other things that take priority.

Bill S-2 is the next thing coming to us that we need to discuss, so I'm not quite sure when we will fit this in.

We have plenty of time, so we can hold off, I believe, until the appropriate time when we need to get that information.

Okay, that takes care of that.

Is everybody okay then with the direction we're taking with the Bratina motion?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, perhaps we could ask the researchers to find out who the federal health stakeholders are in the various departments, agencies, and organizations and provide the information to all the members. That would speed up the process even more. The committee would have a list of potential witnesses and could then decide on its preferences.

[English]

The Chair: That's a great suggestion.

We will move on to the next item of committee business, which is Bill S-2, an act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and to make a consequential amendment to another act. It hasn't been referred to us yet, and based on information I was able to get, the earliest we would have it before the committee is possibly March 20, or even later.

We still don't have it, but when we get it, we need to discuss that. We had informally talked about three meetings. The Senate held three meetings on Bill S-2. If we continue to move forward with three meetings as we had previously talked about, is that acceptable to the committee at this particular time?

Ms. Block.

• (1225)

Mrs. Kelly Block: This was a piece of legislation that was introduced by the Conservatives towards the end of the last Parliament. We did not have the opportunity to look at it in Parliament. I recognize that it's gone through the Senate. They've held three meetings to look at it. I would recommend that we schedule four meetings, plus a meeting for clause-by-clause. There's a fairly lengthy amendment that's been made by the Senate to this bill, and I think there could be other amendments that we as a committee will want to take a look at.

I would recommend that we schedule four meetings. The recall of five million vehicles in the last year probably warrants us taking a really good look at this piece of this legislation to make sure that it's addressing the things that we think are important when it comes to vehicle safety. I recommend that four meetings be put on the agenda, plus a meeting for clause-by-clause. Again, as we roll through this study, we can always get this done in a shorter period of time, but in terms of trying to find the time, especially as we're bumping up against the end of this parliamentary session, I think we'd want to have a clear ability to deal with this legislation.

The Chair: You're suggesting five meetings?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Yes, with four meetings to take a look at the legislation, and then the last meeting to go through clause-by-clause and any amendments that may come from our study or review.

The Chair: Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Going back to the approach I took that I just criticized a moment ago, when I'm trying to figure out who would come to this, unless we wanted to bring in more people who are going to bring very similar messaging, I could only come up with essentially two meetings, plus the clause-by-clause. Even then, for the clause-by-clause, as I picture it in my mind, we could do it in one hour of the meeting. When I thought about the different groups, I had essentially two and a half meetings.

Just to let you know where my head is at, I was thinking of having manufacturers here, which are obviously going to want to have a presence; dealers, in light of the proposed amendment; some group that would speak to the safety issue, which is what this bill is all about; and, the minister and departmental officials. That's who I saw coming up.

Are there groups that wouldn't be captured in those kinds of themes?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Chair, I would suggest that I'm not totally clear yet on what consumer groups we might want to invite to bring us their testimony. I think the Auditor General would be another individual we would put on our list. Again, perhaps we need the time to take a look at the list of witnesses that's going to be put forward and then determine the number of meetings, but I'm in

favour of scheduling at least four meetings for the study on this legislation.

How many meetings did we set aside for the review of Bill C-10?

Okay. We set aside four meetings for that, and there was one clause. That was a change to one clause, and we used up the time to do that.

The Chair: This is a fairly simple one, very much based on safety, and you're familiar with it from before. It's my understanding that it's the same bill that was submitted by your government. The only concern is the amendment that has been placed there.

Monsieur Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I just want to give the committee an idea of the witnesses we already intend to propose—the list is not comprehensive, mind you. Of course, it's imperative that we hear from the Auditor General, as well as the minister. Those two witnesses alone will take up one meeting.

We also want to hear from manufacturers, consumers, dealers, and various independent stakeholders and experts. If we can manage to deal with all that in three meetings and do the clause-by-clause study, that would make us one of the fastest-moving committees ever.

• (1230)

[*English*]

The Chair: I was going to suggest that we're a younger, more dynamic, and faster-working committee than maybe some are and we think we would be able to do that in three meetings—maybe four—but I had better not go there.

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I think the investment of a little time to really figure out what problem we're trying to solve with this legislation would be useful. It would confer additional powers on the minister, which from all I've heard wouldn't be exercised that often. Are we dealing with a systemic issue here where recalls aren't happening or being supported appropriately by the manufacturers? I think that's definitely worth a look. Again, public confidence and consumer protection are key here.

There's the side issue of the relationship between auto manufacturers and the dealers. I would resist the temptation to get high-centred on that issue, because you could spend a lot of time listening to a whole bunch of people telling you exactly the same thing. But the first consideration—why we need this in the first place—is worth a good look.

The Chair: We'll go ahead with four meetings. That would be the intent and the planning, we'd do it in four meetings. If for some reason it requires a fifth, I think the committee is open and flexible. That will be on Bill S-2. If we can include clause-by-clause, great, but let's see what the interest is, the witness lists and so on.

Before I forget, we have an informal meeting request from a delegation from Indonesia for a meeting with us on May 2. This would be an additional meeting to our regular committee meeting. Is there interest in the committee meeting with this delegation?

Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Chair, I looked at the focus of the meeting, and I would put forward that it falls within the same thinking I presented around Mr. Bratina's bill. It seemed to me that they wanted to focus on issues of water security, water management, and that sort of thing. While I know that's an important issue, it is something that in Canada falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces and municipalities. I'm not sure if there's anything else they would like to discuss with us as a transportation committee, unless it's about navigation, and I'm not sure where they were going in their request.

The Chair: This wonderful name, "transportation, infrastructure and communities", frankly can be applied to absolutely everything that goes on in our whole country. If we were to respond to everything, we would never have time to get any other work done. I'll suggest that they meet with some other folks besides this committee if that's the desire of the committee.

We still have the issue that Mr. Aubin raised and that we wanted to look at on aviation safety. I don't know how many weeks we have between now and the end of June, but the suggestion is that the next one we would start would be the aviation study. Is that what everybody wants? It's been on the books for a while. We have seven weeks, maybe nine. We'll start with the aviation study. We've heard discussion about this passenger bill of rights and how that would work with an aviation study. As to the rights of our consumers out there to safe travel, it somehow seems tied together.

Mr. Aubin.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I just have a comment on the airline passenger bill of rights. Since the bill is coming from the minister, I imagine that whenever he does bring it forward, it will land in this committee's lap.

To my mind, there is no reason to tie the two issues together, especially since the one I proposed has to do with aviation safety, which isn't really the case for the passenger bill of rights. I want to give you an idea of the safety considerations that could be directly linked to a potential aviation disaster. These are factors the committee does or could look at: pilot certification; the amount of flying time, particularly for transcontinental flights; cabin air quality; the ratio of crew members to passengers; lasers; cosmic radiation; toxic fumes; and inspector training. All of those elements are directly linked to our ability to make aviation as safe as possible, not only for workers, but also for all air passengers. If possible, I would like to limit our study to safety considerations and spend the appropriate amount of time examining them.

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Chair, I would just like to support Mr. Aubin in his intervention in terms of wanting to keep our study on aviation safety separate—I think that's what I'm hearing—from the bill of rights. I think we should be able to move into that aviation study. As Mr. Aubin pointed out, when the minister tables the legislation, when it's debated and it comes to us in regard to the passenger bill of rights, then I think that's when we can take a look at that.

I would really encourage us as a committee to move forward on our aviation study. This was agreed to in December. I think there was

even an amendment to the motion, and it was supported by everybody here. I think we need to move forward with those things that we as a committee have identified as being a priority.

The Chair: Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Just so I'm clear on the suggestion, this is completely separate and apart from the passenger bill of rights?

Mr. Robert Aubin: Yes.

Mr. Sean Fraser: When I look at the proposed length of meetings as compared to, say, our rail safety study, which I think had four meetings—I may be mistaken, but I think it was four—I assumed that the aviation study would include a piece about the passenger bill of rights as well.

I've met with a handful of groups who have expressed different aviation safety concerns that I think are important, and I'm happy to hear them, but I'm concerned about taking on an awful lot here. I don't want our committee to be bogged down. I do want to give proper attention to aviation safety, but I thought six meetings would have been enough to cover certainly the passenger bill of rights as well as the other safety concerns.

The Chair: Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Well, with a lot of respect for my colleague along the way, the assumption that we could fold a passenger bill of rights into a study when the motion put forward by my colleague didn't include a passenger bill of rights was probably not the best assumption to make, especially when we supported that we would undertake a study on aviation safety.

There was much discussion. There was a motion. There was an amendment to this. The amendment was simply that the chair be empowered to coordinate the schedule and the resources required to execute this request. In the spirit of the acceptance of Mr. Aubin's motion and the only amendment coming forward that the chair be empowered, I think we should continue to look at these two items separately, especially since the minister has announced he's doing this. It's something that will land on this table when he presents it.

Let's move on with our aviation study and then see what he puts forward as a passenger bill of rights.

• (1240)

The Chair: Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Obviously, I agree completely with Ms. Block. In an effort to be as accommodating as possible, I can see only one area where the air passenger bill of rights and the aviation study could overlap: they could have witnesses in common. It is conceivable that we may wish to hear from some of the same witnesses in both studies. In the event that the minister brings the bill forward while we are working on the aviation safety study, I would be amenable to some sort of linkage. In other words, we would agree to adding meetings to the aviation study in order to ask witnesses questions on both topics, provided that doing so does not cut the initial study short. I don't think we should sacrifice the time we want to spend on aviation safety.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Not seeing any further comments, we will go forward.

We had designated the six meetings. If there is, as Mr. Aubin says, some overlap through some of the witnesses, then so be it.

All right? Everybody's all right with that? Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I just want to make sure that we are not altering the name of the aviation safety study to tie in the passenger bills of rights.

[English]

The Chair: We're down for six meetings.

Is that still your desire, Mr. Aubin, to have the six meetings?

Mr. Robert Aubin: Yes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Good.

The Chair: Everybody should start submitting their witnesses for that.

Is there anything else we need to discuss?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, taking into account the current report, can you tell me when the committee can expect to begin the study? I'd like to get a sense of the situation as far as witnesses go.

[English]

The Chair: April 4, possibly. We'll have to get back to you because we have to sort out some of these other things, but we will as soon as we can get things organized, get our witnesses list in, and get witnesses lined up.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: What I gather is that we could start the study on the 23rd. We will work towards that, and we will have at least six meetings, as per the committee's timetable.

[English]

The Chair: We also have the main estimates and the supply that are going to be coming to us. We have Bill S-2 coming to us.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I understand; we won't be adding anything else, aside from the documents from the House we are required to study.

[English]

The Chair: I think we have enough. I look to the committee. Please don't go adding anything more or we'll have to work all summer in order to be on top of it all.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Very well.

[English]

The Chair: From our end, we're not adding anything more onto the agenda.

Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Having said that, I know you've seen two motions that I've put on notice.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Kelly Block: The first is that the committee invite the Minister of Finance to discuss the sale of Canada's federally owned airports. I know we don't have the 48 hours, but I wanted to raise that. I think that will be something that is being foreshadowed.

The second is that the committee invite the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to discuss the positive and negative impacts of the new federal carbon pricing strategy on the transportation sector. Should we end up with some time, I just wanted to raise those two as being very important motions to consider.

The Chair: Thank you for giving us notice.

Now, we have one other one, the smart communities and infrastructure. Mr. Rayes should be here for this. Where do we go with that? Do we want the analysts to do a summary for us? Do we want to hold back and have some further meetings on smart communities and infrastructure later on when we have an opportunity in our schedule? What is the desire of the committee when it comes to the smart cities?

Mr. Sean Fraser: I have a procedural question, first, for the analyst, or the clerk I suppose. If we did a summary of the evidence, essentially, I do not think we have enough of a robust study to really make well-thought-out recommendations at this stage, but it's a very interesting, topical thing that is worth promoting. If we were to do a summary of the evidence, or a summary report, and send a copy to the minister, would we be able to pick up a study if we decided later on, and use the same evidence?

● (1245)

The Chair: Yes, we could do a summary and report it to the House, and later on, do a follow-up.

Mr. Sean Fraser: That would be my preference. I would just hate to see the testimony get lost and the only people to benefit be the ones who tuned into ParlVu's audio recordings of our meetings, which I'd suggest is not that many people. I would recommend that we do a summary report to table in the House, present that to the minister, not necessarily with recommendations but listing the interesting things we learned.

The Chair: However, that is not to preclude us at a future time from going back to doing more work on the infrastructure of smart communities.

Mr. Sean Fraser: If we choose.

The Chair: If we choose. All right.

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I agree with Sean's take on this. In that regard, though, I would like the analyst in preparing the summary to make sure that we capture the questions and answers around how best to manage infrastructure rollout, because I can see some utility in what we heard as we take on a broader study of transportation and the transportation network in Canada. My concerns throughout what we heard there are there's a lot of gee-whiz stuff out there that you can blow a lot of money on for very little return.

I would really like to be able to extract from what we heard some further questions that we can then integrate into that broader study, because at the end of the day, we want things that work and things that give us good bang for our infrastructure dollars.

The Chair: Alexandre, would you like to comment?

Mr. Alexandre Lavoie (Committee Researcher): We could come up with a short list of unanswered issues that may be looked at in future by the minister, by the committee. Is that what you'd like?

Mr. Ken Hardie: There are unanswered issues, but there are also the statements that were made in response to questions about how best we go forward. We want to capture that advice so we can test that advice with other people in the future study.

Mr. Alexandre Lavoie: I understand. We'll try that when the—

The Chair: Do you need anything else before you would be able to write up the summary?

Mr. Alexandre Lavoie: No, the summary will make sure that we cover all issues. We don't need to know where the committee wants to go at that point.

The Chair: Is there any further comment or discussion?

Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I don't want to add new elements, but we were discussing the estimates earlier. In the budget, the government may announce or formally establish an infrastructure bank. I know a motion was put forward, but we may have to do some jostling if the infrastructure bank comes to fruition.

[English]

The Chair: It's on our pending list.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I agree with Mr. Aubin. In fact, that's why I didn't make a suggestion earlier when we were discussing the aviation safety study. The infrastructure bank was one of my priorities, but given the upcoming budget and potential announcements around that, I think it would have been premature. It is often said that we act too early when it comes to legislation. I think we are prepared, then, to wait for an announcement on the infrastructure bank, but as soon as we have enough information, it's imperative that

we add the study to the committee's priorities and fit it into the schedule.

[English]

The Chair: It's our understanding that budget day is going to be March 21, so we'll see what we learn and we'll see where we go from there, but the infrastructure bank was on our list as well as our logistics—

Mrs. Kelly Block: You just announced that to the whole world.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Oh, my gosh, I'm sure I was wrong. Go and tell all your folks it was the wrong date.

All right, not seeing any other hands up—

Mr. Berthold.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Were you going to adjourn the meeting? Madam Chair, I'm afraid you've misjudged me.

[English]

The Chair: Go right ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Next week, we are going to consider the report on the Navigation Protection Act. A number of motions were put forward on the subject. I, for one, have made numerous requests for documents that I would've liked the department to provide us with. Could we discuss them, so as to either remove them from the list of motions or adopt them? I think they could prove quite helpful as we consider the report.

I don't know whether you'll have time to dig out the lists, but I made multiple requests for all kinds of information and documents I thought would be very relevant. I think we should deal with them, as they will no longer be pertinent after the committee has finished considering the report on the Navigation Protection Act.

● (1250)

[English]

The Chair: This is in relation to the NPA. Our analysts were ready to go forward with that on March 7 and March 9 when we come back to deal with the recommendations and the balance of that study.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: As I said, my colleagues and I put forward a number of motions pertaining to requests for information. If we wait to deal with them, it could drag out the study, and I'm fairly certain that isn't what the committee members want.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Berthold, you were here when we gave direction to the analyst to prepare the final report with the recommendations. If you hadn't received those reports, why did you not move those motions then? Now we're in the final days of starting to go through recommendations and a report, and now to have to ask for this information at this point....

You can move your motion. Whether you get that information in time to make some different recommendations on the NPA report, this will be your choice, but if I could be so bold to suggest, you should have moved your motions two weeks ago when we knew the analysts were busy putting the report together.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I am always delighted to put forward motions, but it can take time.

[English]

The Chair: I know.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: We are discussing committee business, so we can settle the matter quite quickly. If the committee does not wish to request the information, that settles that, but there are at least one or two pieces of information I would like to have.

I am particularly interested in one motion. Notice was given, but I can't remember when. It will help the committee members if I read it.

[English]

The Chair: Wait until we see if we can find it.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Here it is.

It's from October 27 and reads as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities ask the Minister of Transport how many notices/requests have been received pursuant to the Navigation Protection Act since January 2016 and that he provide Committee members with a copy of them.

The motion calls on the minister, who indicated that he had requested opinions and done some research on his end, to send the committee copies of those opinions and requests so that we know what he actually received.

I am moving the motion right now. I don't have anything else to add. We can deal with this very quickly. All I want is copies of those documents.

[English]

The Chair: Does Mr. Aubin have a copy of this as well? Does everybody have a copy of this?

You gave us notice of motion Thursday, October 27. We are now into the end of February. We would have been happy to support the requests, I think, or certainly I would have, but now that the analysts have a report ready to come forward with their recommendations....

We have before us a notice of motion duly tabled by Mr. Berthold.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Just a point of clarification, Mr. Berthold. You mentioned during your remarks a moment ago that it had to do with the existence of legal opinions and disclosure of legal opinions.

• (1255)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Not legal, just opinion.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Sorry, I wasn't sure I was looking at the right motion.

Mr. Luc Berthold: You remember the minister said that the official asked for some advice and opinions instead of our committee. I want to know if it is possible for a committee to have it, just to be advised that someone who didn't come here in committee has something to say about that.

The Chair: The motion reads:

That the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities ask the Minister of Transport how many notices/requests have been received pursuant to the *Navigation Protection Act* since January 2016 and that he provide committee members with a copy of them.

We'll have to see. If they can accommodate this prior to us dealing with the navigable waters act, which I know everybody is anxious to deal with and move off of our plate,

Is there any further discussion on this motion?

(Motion negated)

The Chair: I'm sure everybody would have been happy to have done it last week.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I'd like to take two minutes to move another motion, which is also quite relevant.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: It's from the same day, October 27. I was obviously quite busy that day. The motion reads as follows:

That, pursuant to the statement by the Minister of Transport to the Committee on October 4, 2016, that "We have received a lot of comments from many people who had something to say about the piece of legislation put into force in 2014," the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities ask the Minister to provide all members of the Committee with a copy of these comments.

In light of the points raised by my colleague Ms. Block regarding the possibility that witnesses were paid to prepare a report for the department, this is a matter of ensuring full transparency. We would be able to determine whether some of the comments provided to the Department of Transport were not brought to the attention of the committee members.

[English]

The Chair: I'm not aware of anyone being paid to.... Would you like to clarify that comment, Mr. Berthold?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I am referring to the fact that the Department of Transport may have paid witnesses to provide comments, as many witnesses indicated in their letters. In any case, that isn't the issue I want to discuss now; nor is it the purpose of the motion.

All the motion says is this:

That, pursuant to the statement by the Minister of Transport to the Committee on October 4, 2016, that "We have received a lot of comments from many people who had something to say about the piece of legislation put into force in 2014," the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities ask the Minister to provide all members of the Committee with a copy of these comments.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

All those in favour?

I'm sorry, Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I'll be quick, Madam Chair.

I just want to say that I support the motion, as I did the first, because it doesn't require any work on the minister's part. The motion is merely calling for a transfer of documents, and I don't think it will delay preparation of the report by the analysts. Will the information influence our discussions on the report? That remains to be seen. Nevertheless, it seems to me to be factual information, more about quantity than quality.

[English]

The Chair: All those in favour?

(Motion negated)

The Chair: It's one o'clock. I move adjournment.

Thank you all very much for your participation. Have a good week in your constituencies.

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