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Chair: The Honourable Judy A. Sgro



Standing Committee on International Trade

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• (1330)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Apologies for the delays, but technology.... We shouldn't get mad at it, because without it we wouldn't be able to have a meeting at all. I'm sorry for the delay.

Welcome to meeting number three of the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of September 23, 2020. The proceedings are available via the House of Commons website.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I have to outline a few rules.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room, keeping in mind the directives from the Board of Internal Economy regarding masking and health protocols.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. If you are in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officers. As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute.

We will proceed to the business of the day.

The committee will first proceed to hearing witnesses from the department, pursuant to the motion related to COVID-19 and Canada's trade, adopted by the committee on October 23, and we will reserve the last 15 minutes of the meeting for committee business.

I'll introduce our witnesses from Global Affairs Canada.

Sara Wilshaw is chief trade commissioner and assistant deputy minister, international business development, investment and innovation. With her are Christopher Thornley, director general of regional trade operations and intergovernmental relations; Duane McMullen, director general in the trade commissioner service, opera-

tions; and Kendal Hembroff, director general of trade policy and negotiations.

Ms. Wilshaw, I turn the floor over to you. Again, you have our apologies for the delay.

Ms. Sara Wilshaw (Chief Trade Commissioner, Assistant Deputy Minister, International Business Development, Investment and Innovation, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon. I am the chief trade commissioner—newly appointed a couple of weeks ago—and the assistant deputy minister responsible for our trade commissioner service at Global Affairs Canada. I'm delighted to be able to speak to you today about our efforts to support Canadian businesses in their exporting journey.

Many of you may already be familiar with the trade commissioner service, but for those who are not, I'll provide a brief introduction to our work.

The TCS is a network of international business professionals who help Canadian businesses grow through international sales, commercial partnerships and investment. We provide four key services to our Canadian clients, free of charge. These are key market insights and practical business advice, opening the door to new business opportunities globally, identifying qualified contacts, and resolving business problems in foreign markets.

We also offer programs and services aimed at helping Canadian innovators secure the international research and development partnerships that help them turn their innovations into globally successful products and services.

The TCS also plays a key role in attracting job-creating foreign direct investment to Canada, in collaboration with Invest in Canada, other government departments and provincial, territorial and municipal governments.

[*Translation*]

In 2019-2020, the Trade Commissioner Service, or TCS, served 12,000 Canadian clients from 160 locations around the world, including six regional hub offices across Canada. We provide over 50,000 services to our clients each year, and are proud of our 91% client satisfaction rate. Ninety-three per cent of our clients are small and medium-sized enterprises.

[English]

Our analysis shows that the TCS contributes to our clients' exporting 20% more in value, selling to 25% more foreign markets and exporting 11% more product varieties than non-TCS clients. Research shows also that every dollar spent by the trade commissioner service results in \$26 in increased exports.

I am pleased to speak to you today about how the TCS has supported Canadians during the pandemic and what we are doing to help Canada's businesses return to growth.

[Translation]

Since day one of the crisis, the TCS has put its international network and expertise to work in support of Canada's overall pandemic response. Having a strong network of trade commissioners abroad enabled the Government of Canada to quickly identify and engage the right suppliers of PPE and other life-saving equipment in the first months of the pandemic.

[English]

Our trade commissioners have also been able to help Canadian companies get Canada's own COVID-related products and services more rapidly into international markets. Through the TCS's Canadian COVID-19 capabilities directory, we are highlighting products and services of over 154 export-ready Canadian companies to foreign buyers. This initiative is helping us expand our exporter base in innovative sectors, such as life sciences, while also contributing to the international fight against COVID-19.

In addition to helping Canadian businesses continue exporting during the pandemic, the TCS also shifted gears to help companies find new international sources of supply for vital inputs. Not surprisingly, our problem-solving service requests from clients increased by 49% between April and August, compared with the same period in 2019. While COVID-19 has been a shock, the TCS's long-standing commitment to innovation meant that we were actually well positioned to take on the pandemic's challenges.

[Translation]

For example, helping more businesses grow their international sales through e-commerce has been a TCS priority in recent years. The expertise and capabilities we've developed in this area have enabled us to respond to the surge in interest in e-commerce resulting from the pandemic.

• (1335)

[English]

We've also long recognized the potential for digital modernization to enable us to deliver higher-value services, expand our client base and increase efficiency. Major overhauls to our online presence, digital tools, and service in the last year have positioned us to meet today's demand for more digital services and for more service and program delivery via virtual platforms. Indeed, services and programs across the trade commissioner service are adapting to meet the needs of Canadian businesses in today's context, while still advancing long-standing diversification and inclusive trade priorities.

The TCS has successfully transitioned from supporting traditional in-person business meetings to facilitating more virtual events, webinars and trade missions. For example, the trade commissioner service is continuing to promote Canada's women exporters by coordinating a virtual trade mission to South Korea. This mission will support first-time and experienced Canadian exporters and women entrepreneurs in their expansion to the South Korean market.

[Translation]

In response to restrictions on travel and in-person meetings, we have adjusted our popular CanExport-SME program to help SMEs cover the costs of attending virtual trade shows, engaging in e-commerce, and pursuing other activities needed to enter new markets in an increasingly "contactless" business world.

[English]

Despite COVID-19, we have also continued to expand the Canadian technology accelerator program, or CTA, with new programs established in Mexico City and Berlin. CTAs have quickly adapted to the realities of COVID-19. They continue serving high-potential Canadian tech firms through virtual programming, and will do so in the months ahead.

Canada is a trading nation. Goods and services exports are equivalent to 32% of Canada's GDP, and imports to 33%. One in six jobs is related to exports. Canada's recovery and long-term prosperity will depend on renewing our international trade, with an emphasis on continuing to diversify where we export, who exports and what we export. It will also depend on ensuring that Canada continues to attract job-creating FDI.

The TCS will remain focused on helping Canadian businesses increase their resiliency and maximize their recovery by diversifying into new overseas markets, particularly those made more accessible by agreements like CETA and the CPTPP.

[Translation]

Building on over 20 years of experience with the Business Women in International Trade (BWIT) initiative, the TCS will also continue helping exporters of all sizes and ownerships—including women, indigenous, visible minority, LGBTQ2 and youth exporters—expand into global markets. We will also continue positioning the TCS to better help the trade-driven scale-up of our firms in new and emerging sectors, such as digital and clean-tech.

[English]

Supporting scale-up for firms in these sectors will also mean continuing to help them find the right international partnerships to drive innovation, R and D, and commercialization. In partnership with Invest in Canada and others, we will also continue to position Canada as an attractive destination for the FDI that we'll need to reach our job creation and growth objectives.

The TCS has continued to learn, adapt, and apply new approaches and technology to serve clients through our 125-year history, and we plan on doing the same for the next 125 years.

Thank you again for the opportunity to join you today. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Wilshaw.

Again, congratulations and good luck on your new appointment.

We'll move on to our speakers list.

For six minutes, we have Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you again, Ms. Wilshaw, and congratulations on your appointment.

I also want to congratulate Ailish Campbell, who is moving on to be the ambassador to the EU. I think that's a great move. I enjoyed working with her, and I look forward to working with you also.

I'm a big fan of trade commissioners. Whenever I travel, I always try to make sure I stop in and visit with them wherever I go. I've had some great briefings and some great discussions with your trade commissioners.

As I look at COVID-19 and I look at the new travel arrangements or the lack of travel that businesses are going to be able to do, and as I look at the structural changes now created by COVID-19, I wonder about our trade commissioner services and whether they're prepared for this type of new reality. Have you looked at what they should have for resources going forward, whether it's an increase in funding or maybe reallocation of resources from one area to another?

I think you are going to be the face of a lot of businesses in a lot of countries now because these businesses can't travel. I'm curious as to how you are going to handle that.

● (1340)

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: It could certainly be said that our trade commissioners really turned themselves on a dime in this process. I really don't know what more they could have done to help our clients or to continue services during the pandemic. As it was, our service delivery did not stop, even as some of our own trade commissioners were being evacuated. They continued to serve clients by helping them to adapt and adjust and, in some cases, to find new opportunities.

We regularly evaluate the location of our services and the needs of our clients. We actually have an ongoing assessment of whether we are in the right place at the right time to support our clients and

their needs. I do think that we will always be very careful and efficient with our allocations to make sure we are using them in the most efficient way and in the markets where our clients need us.

Mr. Randy Hoback: At the start of the pandemic, I know that our trade commissioners basically got pulled into a variety of things, from logistics to getting people home, and I get that. I think any government, I don't care who's in charge, would have been put in that situation, and they would have stepped in and done their work.

I am now concerned as we look at many of our embassies abroad from which those folks have now come back as they've been evacuated. We're looking at Canadians not travelling as much. What do we need for resources in those embassies? I want to make sure that our trade commissioner services aren't being dragged into areas that are not theirs, areas that belong to somebody else. I get why you got put into those areas at the beginning of the pandemic, but now we have to get back to focusing on Canadian businesses.

Do you sense that happening and do you have any concerns there?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: No, as a matter of fact, as you rightly point out, our trade commissioners have been working very closely with clients. They've never stopped serving their clients. The focus we have had...although it is true that we did pivot some of our efforts towards sourcing, which is not a typical service of the trade commissioner service. We have actually managed to create some success out of that as well, and we've also spent some time identifying excellent Canadian companies that can supply goods and services in the space of PPE and critical medical technologies for others.

I think that we're in the right line of business, and I think we are doing the best we can for our clients and will continue to do so, even remotely. I can tell you that some of the trade commissioners who were evacuated from certain posts due to the context on the ground have continued to work remotely. We have trade commissioners normally posted in India who are serving clients from Vancouver, and we have trade commissioners who are normally in other locations serving their clients and continuing to work and stay in touch with their contacts remotely.

We'll continue to keep an eye on what our clients need and we will continue to work to serve them most efficiently with the resources that were allocated.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Where I get concerned is that—

The Chair: Keep it very short, Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I'll be very short. I wish I had more time.

Businesses in Canada can do a Zoom call, but having trade commissioners who should be in India instead doing Zoom calls in Canada is not necessarily providing the value other than the expertise they learned when they were in India. That may be okay for a short term, but in the long term, we have to get them back in the field. What is the game plan to do exactly that, and how do we do that safely?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: The department is looking very closely at where our staff are and, of course, there is a certain duty of care that we are required to manage. Where we were required to have a duty of care to our employees who required an evacuation, we are managing to get them back into a lot of those countries; there are very few they are not able to enter. It certainly does depend on the public health situation in individual countries, but they are continuing to serve clients and doing so quite effectively.

Thank you.

• (1345)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Wilshaw.

Ms. Bendayan, go ahead.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witness and, of course, congratulate her on her appointment as ADM. I also look forward to working with her.

My first question is a bit broad with respect to the state of play of our supply chains. As I'm sure you're aware, Canada did sign onto a number of joint statements and agreements early on in the pandemic. One of the first was signed in March in order to keep supply chains open. What is your view of the supply chains that Canadian exporters and Canadian businesses are relying on at the moment?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: Indeed, international supply chains were affected and there were certainly some disruptions and some trade restrictions on the movement of people and, in some cases, of goods. Also, as you rightly mentioned, there were certain discussions in international fora with respect to trying to keep those vital supply chains open.

In fact, international supply chains have actually held up reasonably well during the global pandemic. Our chief economist's office has looked into some of this and can say that there's actually little evidence of large-scale reshoring of supply chains. Doing so, we think, would actually reduce competitiveness going forward. Our preferred approach, of course, is to increase the resiliency of supply chains through co-operation and to improve transparency.

If I may turn to my colleague Kendal Hembroff, who is working with the minister on the WTO proposals in the Ottawa Group, I think she may have something to add here.

Thank you.

Ms. Kendal Hembroff (Director General, Trade Policy and Negotiations, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Sure.

I'm happy to expand a bit in terms of what the impact has been of the various international engagements Canada has undertaken since the start of the pandemic to try to keep supply chains open. That

has taken a number of different forms. We've led a number of international—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Excuse me, Madam Chair.

Interpretation services are signalling that Ms. Hembroff needs to move closer to her microphone for the interpretation to work.

[*English*]

Ms. Kendal Hembroff: All right. I will do my best.

Canada has led on a number of international statements, whether at APEC, the G20 or the WTO, with a view to encouraging other countries to keep their supply chains open and not impose trade restrictions. Our department has been tracking, since the beginning of the pandemic, the number of trade restrictions that countries have imposed, ranging from outright export bans to other types of trade restrictions. Well over 200 trade restrictions have been imposed by different countries around the world since the beginning of March. The vast majority of those have not been notified to the WTO, so there has been a lack of transparency, which obviously impacts Canadian business to a very significant extent.

We have really tried to make the case internationally that any measures countries may need to undertake in response to the pandemic be targeted, proportionate, transparent and consistent with WTO rules. More recently, in the context of the Ottawa Group on WTO reform, which Canada leads, we've been working very closely with like-minded WTO members to try to see what we can do in terms of encouraging the further openness of supply chains.

That includes, for example, the work we're doing right now on trade and health to look at whether there are ways in which we can promote more open trade on a variety of medical and health-related products.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you very much.

To pick up a bit on that, one of the things that I am obviously very concerned about, and that the government is concerned about in general, is that the pandemic is being used as an excuse to turn inward by many countries, and we are seeing an increase in protectionist tendencies.

I appreciate, Ms. Wilshaw, that you're new to the post. Perhaps you or your colleagues could let us know what officials are hearing at your level from other countries. I certainly know about Canada's leadership role in the Ottawa Group and at the WTO. What other measures do you see Canada taking in order to ensure that we continue to have a rules-based international trading system?

• (1350)

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: In this case, the rules-based international order is something that our clients certainly rely upon to ensure a level playing field.

I would turn to Kendal to elaborate on how that supports...and what kinds of conversations have been going on internationally with regard to that.

Ms. Kendal Hembroff: Sure.

As I think members will be aware, Canada has a wide network of international trade agreements—14 agreements with 51 countries. We have tried to leverage those agreements during the pandemic to be able to work with countries with which we have those agreements in place in order to continue to support Canadian business.

For example, when ministers of CPTPP countries met late this summer, we released a statement encouraging the importance of keeping supply chains open. We are also working very closely with the European Union in the context of CETA to ensure that the agreement also continues to support businesses in both Canada and the European Union. Then, of course, we are negotiating a number of other international trade agreements that hopefully will support Canadian companies during the economic recovery.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Good afternoon. Thank you for your presentation.

You talked about digital. We know for sure that we can no longer rely on trade fairs or face-to-face meetings because of the worldwide situation in which we have found ourselves since March. Digital is therefore becoming a necessity; one might almost say that it has become an absolute necessity.

Quebec assists businesses with that type of approach. You talked about federal assistance in your presentation, but I'd like to know what type of assistance is provided and how it is organized.

Could you give us some concrete examples, please?

[English]

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: Thank you. I would be very pleased to speak a bit more about what we have done to go contact-free. Of course, we ourselves are also offering virtually our programs and services normally delivered in person, but I think you are asking more about how we are helping our clients to move in that direction.

We do have a number of offerings for them, including virtual trade missions. We have changed the Canadian technology accelerators and made them virtual. In fact, that has resulted in opening up and lowering the barrier to entry for a number of Canadian companies. If we think about a virtual trade mission, we see that companies that normally might not have had the resources or the time to travel to South Korea are able to join a virtual trade mission much more easily.

We think of a young woman entrepreneur who perhaps has children and is unable to get away for a week or 10 days to travel with the minister. Although we lose some of those corridor conversations and face-to-face interactions, of course, at the same time these kinds of services are open to a much broader audience, and we're very proud of that.

Two nights ago, on Wednesday, the minister launched the virtual trade mission to Korea, with 157 participants, I think. I can get the exact number. I can't think of an example at any time in the past when that number of companies might have been able to participate.

I have just been informed that it was 170. I can't think of a time in the past when we would have taken 170 companies on a trade mission. Certainly, that is a very good example.

I might also just talk in terms of specific supports to our companies and the money that we actually have available to help them. That is through the CanExport program, which normally provides over \$33 million a year to Canadian SMEs, innovators and others. Since the start of the pandemic, the CanExport program has provided over \$20 million to more than 500 Canadian companies looking to diversify their export market. They allow these folks to access all kinds of new services, including hiring folks to help them with their online and digital programs and to access e-commerce platforms, IP assistance, cybersecurity assistance and a number of other things.

The gentleman who manages that program for us is here with us today, and that is Christopher Thornley. If I may, I'll pass it to him to just talk about the specifics of that program and some examples.

• (1355)

Mr. Christopher Thornley (Director General, Regional Trade Operations and Intergovernmental Relations, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

As Madame Wilshaw mentioned, we've been able to serve many companies, even though the program was originally designed around travel and the ability to—

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Excuse me, Madam Chair, I am being notified again about the need to come closer to the microphone, because the interpretation services cannot do their job.

Mr. Christopher Thornley: I apologize, Mr. Savard-Tremblay.

Is that better?

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I am not the one to ask. You need to ask the interpreters whether it is okay with them.

Mr. Christopher Thornley: Yes, I understand. I will try to do better.

[English]

I apologize if my voice isn't loud enough for the interpreters, but I'll certainly do my best.

We've had many companies take advantage of the program, even though they are not allowed to travel, whether it be through e-commerce platforms, through expert advice or through learning how to do international business development in a virtual manner.

I'd like to give an example. Minister Ng met recently with a company that is in Labrador, in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and has pivoted very effectively to a virtual platform and used some of the assets that we are able to provide for that.

I'd also like to mention quickly, if I may, that our trade commissioners in Canada—over 130 of them across the country—are working virtually with Canadian companies to support them in their efforts to work internationally. We continue to do virtual outcalls with them while we're restricted from meeting in person, and, as was mentioned, to support them not only in virtual trade missions but also by introducing them virtually to our trade offices around the world.

Thank you very much.

We're also looking at other measures that will allow these companies to be even more effective in an online manner.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go now to Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Hello, and welcome to our witnesses.

Earlier in her testimony, Ms. Hembroff mentioned that Canada is currently negotiating a number of different trade agreements. I would ask her, through you, Madam Chair, if she could table with the committee a list of the agreements that Canada is currently negotiating, the countries involved in those negotiations, the types of agreements that Canada is seeking at those tables, the date of the first meeting for each round of negotiation and the most recent meeting for each agreement as well.

I'm seeing a yes, but I'm not hearing a yes, for the record.

The Chair: Ms. Wilshaw or Mr. Thornley, could you respond to Mr. Blaikie?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: I think the question was directed at Ms. Hembroff, and I saw her nodding, but certainly, we will make sure that you receive that information.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

I noted also that earlier in her testimony, Ms. Hembroff was talking about attempts to keep international supply chains open with respect to medical devices and equipment, but I also know that the government has made efforts to develop domestic supply chains for equipment that we need. I note that in a number of trade agreements to which Canada is a party, there are investor-state dispute settlement clauses.

I'm wondering if the department has done any kind of impact assessment or analysis of Canada's legal and financial exposure under the ISDS provisions of existing trade agreements, and if Ms. Hembroff can speak to those.

• (1400)

Ms. Kendal Hembroff: Maybe I can just confirm, while I have the floor, that, yes, we would be happy to provide the committee with a list of all the international trade negotiations in which Canada is engaged, with all of the relevant facts and information about the first round of negotiations as well as the most recent.

With respect to the question the member has posed regarding ISDS and its potential implications in terms of some of the measures that Canada is undertaking domestically, I'm not aware of any formal analysis that has been conducted in terms of initiatives for trade and health. Of course, when federal departments, as well as provinces and territories, are considering domestic measures, we typically undertake an assessment from the perspective of our international trade obligations to make sure that what is being considered is fully consistent.

I will need to check to see whether anything has been done specifically in the area the member has raised. Is there a particular measure on which you are seeking to know whether an assessment has been conducted?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm just curious to know whether or not there have been analyses conducted with respect to any of the investor-state dispute settlement clauses in agreements to which Canada is a party. I'm thinking particularly, in this context, of efforts to ensure that we can produce and supply medical PPE, but also other types of medical equipment that have been relevant to the pandemic. I'm thinking also about ventilators, for instance, or anything that would fall under that umbrella of goods that are required in order to meet the demands of the pandemic. I'm quite glad that Canadian companies have stepped up in order to fill that need, but I am concerned that companies from outside of Canada that are operating out of countries that are party to some of these agreements with Canada may eventually look on that unfavourably and seek damages under our current trade laws.

I'm curious to know what the government knows about that and what work has been done in order to understand what those risk factors are and whether or not, in the opinion of the government, there is a real risk. I'd also like to know if there's a contingency plan or if there's been any effort to engage our partners under those agreements to talk about temporarily suspending ISDS provisions. I know there are certainly a lot of Canadians who have engaged in a letter-writing campaign to ask that parties at the very least temporarily suspend ISDS provisions during the pandemic so that there's no fear that public policy might not go down the road of ensuring that we have a reliable domestic supply of the things we need at this time because of concerns about provisions of international trade agreements.

I'm just trying to give you as much context as possible. Whatever conversations have happened within the department and whatever analysis has taken place that you can share with the committee, I would love for you to share, perhaps in writing once you've had the opportunity to do that.

Could I ask that you commit to getting back to the committee in writing with whatever you think is pertinent to this general theme?

Ms. Kendal Hembroff: Chair, if you're in agreement, I'd be more than happy to have the department get back to the committee on this issue.

The Chair: That's terrific. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

We go now to Mrs. Gray for five minutes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to congratulate you, Ms. Wilshaw, on your appointment. I look forward to working with you.

I have a question. Prior to COVID-19 being declared a pandemic, what percentage of Canadian trade commissioners were posted abroad?

• (1405)

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: We are roughly one thousand abroad. There are about one thousand trade commissioners overseas. That includes locally engaged and Canada-based, which means that they are Canadian diplomats posted overseas. We also have a large number of locally engaged officers who are citizens or local residents of the countries around the world. We then have approximately 400 in Canada, all across Canada in every province and territory, including some here in Ottawa as well. One thousand out of 1,400 means that roughly two-thirds are posted abroad.

Duane McMullen is here with us, and he is the director general of TCS operations. I don't know if Duane has more precision to offer.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you for that. I was wondering if it's different now than it was pre-pandemic. Have the numbers changed?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: I think I mentioned, Madam Chair, that some of our trade commissioners were evacuated for health and safety reasons earlier in the pandemic. Most of them have, in fact, returned to their posts, where that has been possible. I can get back to the committee with precise numbers for those who remain unable to return to their posts, but the vast majority have returned.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: That's great. Thank you very much.

Can you table with the committee any analysis your department has done on changing the rubric for eligibility for trade commissioner services since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic? I'm referring specifically to the trade commissioner service eligibility and service requirements.

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: Certainly. I am happy to table that.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Great. Thank you very much.

I have one other thing that I wanted to ask about. Can you table any analyses or reports your department has done on the effectiveness of trade commissioners in each region they're posted in, such as, again, referring to percentage of increase, dollar value and proactive outreach?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: Yes, I'm happy to table that. I can provide some insights now, if you'd like.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: We're up against a very tight clock here, so if you have something very short to tell us, then we can get the rest of the information. That would be great.

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: Madam Chair, I'm very happy to tell the committee that in some cases our services have increased in certain areas. Problem-solving, as I mentioned, is up considerably against normal times of the year. Our client satisfaction rates are also dramatically increased because, of course, our clients really needed our help and were grateful to receive it.

Most of our numbers are down slightly over the usual year-on-year comparisons but still fairly impressive. If I might, I'll just say that in the last year we've been looking at 4,700 clients served or referred, almost 12,000 services delivered just in COVID, and over 790—nearly 800—successes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you very much for that high-level description.

Can you table any analysis your department has done to prepare trade commissioners if Canada ends up going back to the WTO rules on December 31 in trade with the United Kingdom if we don't have an agreement?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: Certainly. Just to be very clear on that and also on the earlier question, there is no change in the eligibility for our trade commissioners' clients. In terms of the firms we work with or any Canadian firms that are facing any kinds of challenges, we haven't changed the eligibility requirements, and we would not change the eligibility requirements for the companies with which we work in the face of any change in our trade agreements with the United Kingdom.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will move on to Mr. Sarai.

• (1410)

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the guests we have here today.

Surrey Centre is home to one of the largest softwood lumber mills...and employers in the province and perhaps even in the country. As you are well aware, lumber prices are very high right now. In fact, there are record highs of \$800 per thousand board feet, or more. It's good for the industry currently, but my fear is that the Americans may retaliate again, as we've seen in patterns in the past.

What pre-emptive conversations or work has your office done with the Americans to make sure that this doesn't happen?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

The trade commissioners are working with the clients, of course, to ensure that they have opportunities presented before them and that they are in the best position to take advantage of those opportunities.

In terms of the discussions with the Americans and negotiations regarding softwood lumber, I would defer to my colleague Kendal Hembroff for that response.

Ms. Kendal Hembroff: This particular dispute that we have with the United States on softwood lumber is outside of my own responsibilities. If the member would appreciate more information on that, I might suggest that we maybe provide some clarification in writing. I don't specifically work on our softwood lumber discussions with the United States.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I would appreciate it if you could send something over to us afterwards. I think other members on this panel would also appreciate that.

Second, although my riding is not an agrarian riding, it's a port riding and we have a lot of exports out of it. Lentil exports have been doing very well. Canadian lentils are being exported to Asia in particular, as well as the Middle East. How is the trade commission working to ensure that this steady supply is not interrupted? As we've seen, different countries, sometimes arbitrarily, have imposed either tariffs or unreasonable fumigation policies.

Can you elaborate on that and let us know how we've been working with those countries to make sure that it's consistent and that Canadians know they can sell their food products globally?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: Thank you very much for the question.

Of course, our trade commissioners in the field are always working with our farmers and producers to help them find opportunities, to diversify those opportunities, to ensure that they have good, solid partnerships in place and to help them solve problems when problems arise, including informing our trade policy colleagues when certain barriers come up and asking them to work very closely and quickly with our colleagues at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to try to resolve them in a longer term.

Short-term, of course, we are always there to help with problem-solving. I can speak to personal experience. When I was posted in India, we had occasional difficulty getting product through or off the dock. We engage on the ground with the local governments and try to work through these things using science-based evidence to talk about those kinds of market access issues.

I would defer to my colleague, if she has anything to add from a trade policy and negotiation standpoint.

Ms. Kendal Hembroff: As the member may be aware, right now our pulses trade is facing significant challenges, in the Indian market in particular. I think you raised one of the issues in that case, which relates to some fumigation requirements, among others.

We're working very closely with our Indian counterparts to try to find a science-based solution. We raise our concerns at a variety of levels. We also work through the various WTO committees that are responsible for allowing WTO members to raise these kinds of issues when they arise.

Ultimately, in some cases our government may decide with a particular irritant to proceed to formal dispute settlement, when we feel that another country's measures are outside the commitments they have made under our trade agreement. Of course, we work very closely as well with the trade commissioner service and our

missions abroad in engaging in international advocacy. Ultimately, our aim when these types of problems arise is to resolve them as quickly as possible.

Now, some of these issues can be quite challenging, so sometimes they can take some time to resolve. Certainly we're aware of some of the significant challenges facing our agriculture sector in a number of different sectors, including the pulses sector in India.

• (1415)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

We'll move on to Mr. Savard-Tremblay for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

My question is for you, Ms. Hembroff. You alluded to certain negotiations being under way right now. How are the current trade negotiations with Mercosur going? We know that environmental groups have recently stepped in to ask Ottawa to temporarily suspend discussions because of the record-breaking forest fires. This issue has an environmental aspect to it as well.

In the European Union, France and Germany have also moved to suspend the negotiations for the same reasons.

Have you also put them on hold for now? What is the current status?

[*English*]

Ms. Kendal Hembroff: Chair, we have not had a negotiating round with the Mercosur countries now since—I'll just double-check the date—almost one year ago. This is largely due to the pandemic, which did not allow us to host a negotiating round this fall as we had originally hoped to be able to do.

In the meantime, though, we are engaging virtually with our Mercosur counterparts across a number of different areas. At the same time, we are also aware of the concerns that have been raised with respect to some of the environmental protection issues, in Brazil in particular. We have really made a point in all of our international trade agreements to ensure that trade and environmental issues are very prominent.

We're certainly committed, in the context of a possible Canada-Mercosur agreement, to ensuring that trade liberalization and environmental protection are mutually supportive. From that standpoint, we have been pursuing in the negotiations a very robust and comprehensive environment chapter. This includes core environmental provisions focused on maintaining high levels of environmental protection and ensuring robust environmental governance, as well as a range of provisions to address global environmental issues, including commitments to promote sustainable forest management and combat illegal logging and related trade.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that information.

We'll go now to Mr. Blaikie for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

On that theme, is it the position of Global Affairs that it can sometimes be a legitimate way to put pressure on other countries to improve their behaviour with respect to, for example, the environment by abstaining from trade negotiations or refusing to enter a formalized trade relationship? Does the department think that that can be a legitimate strategy from time to time?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Chair, on a point of order, with respect to the relevance to the motion that is before the committee, I think we're straying a bit far from Mr. Hoback's motion on the impact of COVID-19.

The Chair: Thank you very much for pointing that out. This could be a very, very broad topic, so with the motion we are trying to focus exactly on the impacts of COVID-19 on trade.

I'll go back to Mr. Blaikie. If you want to take your comments in a different direction, that would be helpful.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Well, I certainly look forward to following up on this theme at some time, Madam Chair, but I do take your point that another forum or another study might be a more appropriate venue. The issue may come up, though, because as we discuss with other countries, for instance, supply chains for goods that are required in the pandemic context, there may be countries that...

Part of what I'm trying to understand is whether the government's position is that we trade first and ask questions later, or whether it can be a legitimate strategy to say that in order to put pressure on other countries for non-trade-specific types of policies, we withhold trade from Canada.

I'll put the same question without the environmental example. In the instance that we are negotiating some kind of trade provision that is pandemic-related, might it not be a legitimate strategy for the government to see its trade agenda as a way to put pressure on other countries to exhibit certain forms of behaviour regarding things that aren't directly trade issues, as we normally understand them, but that Canada and Canadians nevertheless feel very strongly about?

• (1420)

The Chair: Could we have a very short response to Mr. Blaikie?

Ms. Kendal Hembroff: Chair, I think probably the shortest answer I could give is that our trade policy is an extension of our foreign policy, so when we are considering whether to embark on a prospective negotiation or conclude a particular trade agreement, there are a lot of different considerations, including potential commercial benefits to Canadian business, a variety of different foreign policy considerations and, in some cases, development considerations.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: So those might include Canada's environmental commitments as well.

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

I have to move to Mr. Aboultaif for five minutes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Good afternoon, Ms. Wilshaw. Congratulations again, and welcome to you and your team who are appearing before committee today.

I've heard three figures: that we have 1,000 trade commissioners abroad, that we have about 130 back in Canada because of COVID, and that for every dollar we spend we get \$26 in export.

It seems like a healthy margin, but in terms of trade, in my opinion, those figures could be in a way meaningless in terms of some of the benchmarks that we would probably be interested in seeing. We have about 13% of the trade commissioners back in Canada. The question is, how much does that affect trade and export in general?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: Madam Chair, we have not seen that having the very few trade commissioners who have not been able to return to their posts being back in Canada at the moment has resulted in less trade per se. There may be other reasons for reductions in the movement of goods and services abroad. It would be impacted by some of the trade restrictions that were put in place, of course, but in terms of the trade commissioner service, I don't think that the movement of trade commissioners back to Canada has resulted in a reduction in service or in trade.

In fact, as I think I mentioned earlier, our trade commissioners have continued, even from their places of evacuation, to serve our clients and to serve them very, very well during this time.

I'll turn to my colleague Duane McMullen, who is on top of our operations. He might be able to speak to some of these examples.

Duane.

Mr. Duane McMullen (Director General, Trade Commissioner Service - Operations, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Chief Trade Commissioner Wilshaw.

Madam Chair, in response to the member's question, though we have had a number of trade commissioners back in Canada for duty of care purposes, most of them, as the chief trade commissioner has mentioned, are back at mission now. At the same time, we have been innovating on how we can help Canadian business be successful by doing business remotely instead of by a physical visit to the marketplace, and also to have the right tools and the right training so they can have a virtual business meeting with their counterpart.

Minister Ng is in fact leading a large virtual trade mission to Korea next week as a larger-scale test of how we can help Canadian business succeed and find new customers, even in a world where it's much more difficult to travel internationally to meet those customers.

• (1425)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

As a matter of curiosity, on the margin of \$1 to \$26, if we were to compare it to similar economies, how are we doing?

Mr. Duane McMullen: The economic research is done according to a standard methodology as defined by the International Trade Organization, which is a Geneva-based United Nations entity. Trade promotion organizations from many countries do similar research to generate the impact of their own trade promotion organizations. We can provide some of those comparisons to the committee as a follow-up, but Canada compares very well against other trade promotion organizations according to—

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: How often do we monitor that benchmark or that target? I heard Ms. Wilshaw mention that we had a drop in exports in some areas, not necessarily due to the current situation that we and the world are living through. Is the \$26 still there now? Are we aiming higher to improve? We know that we have a lot of room to grow as far as exports go. This is something that, if it's being used as a benchmark, would be nice to look at and of course to try to improve exports further.

The Chair: If we could get a short answer to that question, it would be appreciated.

Mr. Duane McMullen: Yes, we look closely at that number, and we always want it to be a better number.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go on to Mr. Sheehan for five minutes.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the presenters for the presentation. Thanks for your hard work. I know that you've been working extremely hard, like many of our great civil servants who have really stepped up to the plate during COVID-19. I want to recognize that. The roles that you're connecting everyone into in acting as that facilitator of trade during these times have really been critical in connecting the government to small and medium-sized enterprises, to the large auto sector, etc.

I represent Sault Ste. Marie. As many people on this trade committee know, I represent the second-largest steel-producing area in Canada, which plays a very important role in a lot of supply chains: the oil and gas industry, the auto industry and just manufacturing in general. I would like to zero in on the auto sector in particular, because we've seen it close because of COVID and we've seen it open up.

From your perspective, where are we now and where are the areas that we might want to concentrate on to continue to support the auto sector as it relates to trade and those important supply chains? The steel that's made in Sault Ste. Marie is made with coal and iron ore from the United States. It's getting put on those trucks, ships and rail lines, coming up here and being made into steel, and then being put back on trucks. Sixty per cent of Algoma Steel's exports go to the United States. They head back across that border.

Can I get your comments on that, please, particularly on the trucking industry and on going across the border as well? Thank you.

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: I recall seeing tables earlier on. I'm sure we can provide some of this information about specifically the number of trucks that cross the border. Obviously, there was a very strong interest in maintaining as much as possible of the open and free

movement of essential goods and services, including trucks bringing essential supplies and other things into the country for the auto sector and all sectors, including making sure the shelves in our grocery stores are stocked.

In terms of what the trade commissioner service is doing, we are working very closely with our clients. We stay in touch with the industry associations, as well as the provincial and territorial counterparts, to ensure that we are looking for every opportunity to support their businesses, whether that's maintaining or finding additional or alternate supplies or alternate customers, and doing what we can to make sure their businesses are able to operate.

• (1430)

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Thank you very much.

It's so critical to keep that open. Here there was a lot of nervousness, obviously, when we weren't too sure which way the American administration was going. It looked like they were, at one point, going to do a full shutdown. I was pleased to see that the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister were able to smooth things over, because that would have just devastated towns like Sault Ste. Marie. Thank you.

With COVID-19, we're seeing more and more people do things via the Internet. Obviously, we're doing this meeting virtually. In Ontario, we had an announcement for small and medium-sized businesses back in June through FedDev and FedNor, which I'm the parliamentary secretary for, of about \$500 million for SMEs in three levels, which are sort of beginners, medium and then advanced. Could you make comments on businesses, not only in Ontario but in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, and how they're adapting to COVID-19 in using commerce-enabled websites or just websites to promote trade? Do you have any recommendations?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: I'm pleased to talk a little bit about this and how we're supporting our clients and Canadian companies in going virtual. In fact, this is the subject of a big part of the program that Mr. Thornley manages through our regional offices. Certainly that's there. We have enhanced services for digital industries, trade, intellectual property and e-commerce that were part of our trade diversification strategy that was launched some time ago.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we began to orient ourselves towards these kinds of platforms even before the pandemic. We created 21 new positions in key markets like Tokyo, Mexico, Delhi, Bangalore, Brussels, Washington, D.C., our mission to ASEAN, Shanghai, Beijing and other places around the world in order to support our Canadian companies in accessing these virtual platforms, understanding the risks associated with them, protecting their IT and their financial transactions appropriately, and so on.

In fact, I hear from my chief economist that the number of Canadian SMEs exporting went from 19,600 in February to 15,600 in April, and is now back up to 18,400. That's 6% lower than February but a significant improvement. A lot of that is due to the fact that they have been able to access online platforms and e-commerce ways of connecting with their clients.

I should just mention very quickly that the trade commissioner service is not the only service helping Canadian companies do this. There are programs through ISED and other government departments, as well as the provinces and territories themselves, that are working closely with Canadian companies to help them access these opportunities online and to get themselves onto e-commerce platforms.

I'll defer to you, Madam Chair, on whether there's time for Mr. Thornley to add anything here.

The Chair: Thank you. Just to keep up with the schedule to give all the members the opportunity, I'm on to Mr. Lobb for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Chair, I would like to raise a technical detail.

I am told that the people on the telephone have had no interpretation for about five minutes. We do have it here and we can hear it fine, but it seems that people attending by telephone are not hearing it.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: On a point of order, we have no translation, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, I noticed that. Just give us a second.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Lafrance): Madam Chair, may we suspend for five minutes, please?

The Chair: We will suspend for five minutes.

• (1435) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1440)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Given the fact that we have to do committee business, this will be the last opportunity for questions.

Mr. Lobb, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is a pretty basic question. If I'm a business owner, manufacturer or entrepreneur and I want to do business in a particular country, when I call the office of that particular embassy, consul general or whatever it is, how long does it take for me to get a callback?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: Thank you for the question.

We do have a very quick response rate, and we try our best to get back to people as soon as we possibly can—within a matter of hours if that's possible. It depends, obviously, on some time zones. Of course, we also like our clients to stay very close to the regional offices that we have, which are located all across the country. They should be able to get back to them in real time.

We certainly have a service standard that is to get back to them with a response within.... Duane will correct me if I'm wrong here, but I believe it is 48 hours. Sometimes it takes a bit of time to find

the detailed information we need to answer whatever the question might be, and then we will of course communicate that we are digging further into it and will get back to them.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Okay. If your standard is 48 hours, what percentage of the time do you meet that standard of 48 hours?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: I'm sorry. I misspoke earlier. I have been corrected. We have a standard of five working days for a response, so I was a little ambitious in that, but obviously I do know that our trade commissioners try to get back to their clients as soon as they possibly can. We meet the standard over 90% of the time and we usually respond within 24 hours, but of course, as I said, some issues are more complex and do take a bit more time for us.

If I may finish—I know you don't have a lot of time—we do track our client satisfaction rate very closely, and we take it seriously when the clients tell us that we are not being responsive. We follow up with that office to see what happened and why we weren't able to respond quickly. We try to address those factors as soon as we possibly can.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Okay.

This summer I was talking to an ambassador who is stationed in Canada. We were having an introductory conversation. The ambassador mentioned to me that they were looking for a particular potential software service and asked me if I knew of any potential companies in Canada that might be able to help them out. I thought that was nice, but at the same time, I thought to myself that in the country where they're looking for this service it seemed odd to me that our trade commissioner or somebody would not be able to connect the dots to that.

My question is, do the trade commissioners in all the countries constantly follow the contracts and the tenders, whether government or private? Do they have a list of companies in Canada that may be able to meet this, and is it refreshed? In this particular case, how could a government contract in that country be missed when there's at least one company in Canada that I'm aware of that could have met that service? How does that happen?

• (1445)

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: I'm certainly glad the opportunity was raised. I hope it was transmitted to the trade commissioner service for action. As you rightly point out, there very likely is a Canadian company that can meet the needs.

We do have people who watch for tenders and who watch for what's going up and for opportunities all over the world all the time. We reach back to our regional network to see if there are clients who can fulfill that need. Then we reach out to them and present those opportunities. They aren't always taken up. I should be—

Mr. Ben Lobb: Is there a portal the said trade commissioner enters that filters into a central filter in Canada and that business or other trade commissioners can look at? Or how does it work? How does it get populated so that somebody will actually know this?

Ms. Sara Wilshaw: I might defer to my colleague Duane McMullen to answer that question. Certainly, we have a website that is quite robust with a lot of information on it.

Duane's team manages that, so perhaps I can defer to him.

Mr. Duane McMullen: When a trade officer in the field identifies an opportunity, the best way to get action is to connect it directly with the Canadian companies that are capable of acting on those opportunities. That's how we get to that \$26 in exports per dollar invested in the trade commissioner service.

In cases where it's not obvious in terms of knowing which Canadian company could action an opportunity, we work with our domestic network. We have trade commissioners in every province across the country. We share those opportunities with our domestic network for them to be able to identify, either directly from the businesses they work with or by working with their provincial counterparts, a business in the province that might be able to take advantage of that opportunity.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I have one last quick question. One of our members mentioned rules-based trade. Everything is rules-based trade. Does any country we deal with actually apply rules-based trade? It would be my opinion that none of them do. They pick the rules when they see fit. I'm looking for one country that would actually do true rules-based trade, other than Canada.

Ms. Kendal Hembroff: Unfortunately, Chair, there isn't a quick answer to that question. I think maybe it was more of a comment.

Mr. Ben Lobb: That has to be my time.

The Chair: If you can find an answer—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Chair, once again, we have no interpretation because the microphone is too far away.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Hembroff, please repeat what you just said there.

Ms. Kendal Hembroff: There isn't really a quick answer to the member's question.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Ms. Wilshaw and associates, for the good work you're doing in very difficult times. You appear to have a great group of associates working with you, Ms. Wilshaw, and I wish you much success.

We are going to deal with committee business.

Witnesses, you can do whatever it is you do to leave the meeting so that we can continue with our committee business. I'll just give everybody a minute to find their way.

We're going to deal with Mr. Dhaliwal's motion. I asked the clerk to send out another copy of the motion, plus a revised version. I need to read into the record certain things in order to explain my position on that motion.

Standing Order 67(1) and Standing Order 67(2) consider a motion to go in public or in camera to be non-debatable. This is also outlined in Bosc and Gagnon on page 1089:

Any member may move a motion to go from sitting in public to sitting in camera (and vice versa). The motion is decided immediately without debate or amendment.

As members know, committees may adopt procedural rules to govern their proceedings, but only to the extent that they respect the higher sources of authorities, which the Standing Orders are. In the previous Parliament, the procedure and House affairs committee and the human resources committee adopted similar motions. For reference, the procedure outlined in this type of motion tended to be used more as a guide for the chair and the committee on a way to proceed rather than as a strict rule. Generally speaking, a committee may decide to adopt this as a general way of proceeding and there may be agreement to continue to do so. However, it is important that members of the committee know that, at some point, there could be a risk of this motion coming into conflict with what is laid out in the Standing Orders mentioned above.

Given the discussion that we had on Mr. Dhaliwal's motion, my sense from the committee members who spoke to it was that they clearly wanted to have that motion in place, so I am not going to rule it inadmissible. What I have suggested is a couple of amendments that would make it much easier for us to function as a committee. You should all have the amendments with you, and I can read this out if necessary.

First, this version of the motion could be interpreted by some as taking away the chair's discretion to start a meeting in camera. For greater clarity, a line could be included regarding the chair's discretionary authority to call a meeting in camera. For example, in the motion adopted by PROC during the 42nd Parliament, this line was included: "That the Chair may schedule all or portions of a meeting to be in camera for the reasons listed above".

Second, committee business is not included, which means that, for example, to call a meeting to discuss the committee's working calendar, as it stands now, I would not be in a position to make this decision. Therefore, I would suggest that committee business be added to the list of purposes to go in camera in Mr. Dhaliwal's motion.

Finally, as the motion reads now, there are no limits to the debate about going in camera or in public, which could go on for quite a while, eating all the time that the committee would have at its disposal. Here again, a suggestion is that, as PROC did in the 42nd Parliament, we move:

That any motion to sit in camera shall be subject to a debate where the mover, and one member from each of the other recognized parties, be given up to three minutes each to speak to the motion; and that the mover shall then be given up to one minute to respond.

With those suggested amendments to Mr. Dhaliwal's motion, things should continue to flow as they have previously, and I think with the support of the committee.

Is there any discussion? Is someone prepared to move those suggested amendments to Mr. Dhaliwal's motion?

Mr. Sheehan, go ahead.

• (1450)

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Madam Chair, I hope I hit the virtual hand right. It came up with a yellow hand, so I hope I hit the right button, but I'm not sure. Christine is saying yes.

I would like to move those amendments as stated and circulated.

The Chair: Is there any discussion? Is it unanimous?

Mr. Ben Lobb: Madam Chair?

The Chair: Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Madam Chair, I thought I had the "raised hand" function up, but it might be...

The Chair: I didn't see it. This is all a new process for us.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Yes. It is for me too.

My question is with regard to what you read out about the time limit. Was it for presenting a motion to go in camera? I can't remember how you phrased it. It would seem to me that it would be limiting debate, in a way. It's not a criticism of you, obviously, but I'm not quite sure we usually have that as a practice, limiting debate on a motion.

I'm just wondering if we could get some more clarification on that one.

The Chair: Let me read it out again. This was the suggestion:

That any motion to sit in camera shall be subject to a debate where the mover, and one member from each of the other recognized parties, be given up to three minutes each to speak to the motion; and that the mover shall then be given up to one minute to respond.

It wasn't to stifle debate; it was so that we wouldn't end up using an hour to discuss whether we'd go in camera or not. I believe that's what this would achieve. It was adopted by PROC as well. You know how these things sometimes go, where we can end up debating for an hour, easily, on whether we'll go in camera or not.

By restricting the mover to three minutes and giving everyone three minutes to speak to the motion, the issue then technically would be dealt with within about 30 minutes, at the most. I think that was the intent. PROC adopted that in the 42nd Parliament.

• (1455)

The Clerk: Mr. Hoback has his hand raised.

The Chair: Mr. Hoback, I don't even have you on the screen.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Let me try talking. Can you see me now?

The Chair: There you are.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I'm just curious to know how you came to the conclusion of one member from each party and then limiting it at that. With Zoom meetings, I think one member...that could be really awkward and tough. Is this something they have done in other committees, that they have gone to one member for three minutes? Is that enough time, or should we be basing it on something to reflect the population of the House? There are more Liberals. There are more Conservatives. Do we want to do something like that, where you look at that scenario and say that each party, based on their representation in the House, would have that amount of time to speak on a motion to go in camera?

I'm just throwing it out there for people to discuss.

The Chair: PROC has adopted this particular part as well, in the exact same format. Presumably, if PROC feels it's suitable for that committee, I would think it would be okay for ours. Again, I guess we can always change something later on or at another point, if we want to.

Madam Clerk, do you have any comments on that?

The Clerk: No.

The Chair: Good clerk; she doesn't. She probably doesn't like the fact that I overruled you to begin with.

Clearly, the committee wanted to go in this direction. I was just looking for a way to make sure we went in that direction and everybody would be comfortable.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Ms. Sgro?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I don't know if I'm in order or out of order here on the list.

The Chair: That's okay. I don't have a list, but I have to make the list.

Go ahead, Ben.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Was it Mr. Dhaliwal who presented this?

The Chair: No. Mr. Dhaliwal presented a motion that we circulated. It was fairly lengthy. This was an amendment.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Who presented the amendment?

The Chair: The amendment is in order for this...because technically, Mr. Dhaliwal's motion is inadmissible. In the discussion and debate that we had, it was clear that the committee would prefer to adopt the motion. We held it back, because our very experienced clerk indicated that it was not admissible in its current form. When I indicated that I would like to find a way to make it admissible, these were the suggestions that the clerk, in consultation with the committee and me, decided we would put forward.

I'll just throw it out there that if the committee feels that this issue of the timing of the debate on the motion or whatever may cause them some difficulty, then we can leave out that part of it and simply vote on the part that says the chair "may schedule all or portions of a meeting" in camera for the reasons that we listed above, which is Mr. Dhaliwal's motion.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: I'm curious as to why we didn't see at least a hint of this before the meeting so at least we could have understood it better.

The Chair: Everyone received a copy of Mr. Dhaliwal's motion again, as well as the suggested amendments to it, so we wouldn't have to spend a lengthy amount of time dealing with this issue. The clerk sent it out.

I'm sensing that you're not happy with the idea of limiting the debate, so I'm going to suggest that we not vote on that section, and that Mr. Sheehan move only the issue that included amending Mr. Dhaliwal's motion to add "That the Chair may schedule all or portions of a meeting to be in camera for the reasons listed above."

• (1500)

Mr. Terry Sheehan: So do I.

The Chair: Is everybody okay with that? Is everybody comfortable with that now?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Sorry, Madam Chair, but I've also been trying to use the electronic means of getting on the speakers list.

The Chair: I know. I think you have to just wave for now.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: That's fine too. I'm happy to indicate in whatever way works best for the chair, but please do put me on the speakers list.

The Chair: All right, Mr. Blaikie, you're on the list.

It's your time.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Right on.

I just wanted to say that I'm sure it was sent, but I've been having a little bit of trouble with the distribution list. I didn't see a recirculated copy of the original motion, and I haven't seen the wording of the amendment. I don't know if it's possible for the clerk to send that around now, at least to me. Maybe it's just as convenient to send it to the whole committee, for those of us who have our email open, and then we can just see quickly in writing what we're being asked to vote on. I think that would be helpful.

I'm going by memory, because I don't have it in front of me, but I'd say the original motion does provide for disclosing what substantive motions were voted on in camera and the results of the votes. As long as I'm right about that, I have a higher level of comfort with allowing for meetings to start in camera, and if the chair really wants to have a session in camera at the beginning of the meeting, I do think we could probably deal with that quickly just by having a quick motion at the beginning of the meeting.

I'm not interested in dying on the hill of whether you can start a meeting in camera or not. I'm just kind of digesting these things on the fly, which is too bad.

The Chair: I'm going to make another suggestion. I'm going to ask the committee if we can hold Mr. Dhaliwal's motion to our next meeting. I don't like asking committee members to vote on anything that they're not feeling particularly comfortable with, especially on this. I'll ask the clerk to circulate Mr. Dhaliwal's motion to the committee again, plus the suggested amendments, and we'll deal with them at our next meeting. I would ask that everybody take a few minutes before the next meeting to make sure they fully understand the implications, and then we'll move forward.

Is that all right with everybody?

It is three o'clock and it's been a technically challenging meeting today for everyone.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: That works for me, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

There's one other thing. We've been informed that the whips have agreed to next week's calendar. Tuesday, November 3, Minister Ng and her officials will be appearing before the committee to discuss the main estimates.

Madam Clerk, is that a 3:30 time slot?

The Clerk: It is, Madam Chair, for two hours.

The Chair: All right, so the minister will be here at that particular time.

If everything is okay, we'll move to adjourn until next—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: On a point of order, Madam Chair, since we're moving what we were just discussing, the notice of motion that we just tabled here today, I just want to make sure that won't cut into our meeting with the minister and the officials, because our time is so limited. The minister will be with us for only an hour, and then we'll have the officials. I just want to make sure that doesn't cut into our time.

The Chair: Yes, that's why I will make sure that the clerk sends it out right away, and then I will ask that it be resent an hour before the meeting again to make sure everybody has seen it and is comfortable with it, and we should be able to dispose of it in the last—

Mr. Randy Hoback: Point of order.

The Chair: —10 minutes or so of the meeting, I would hope.

Go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Madam Chair, in the same line, instead of doing it at the start of the meeting, why don't we wait and do it at the end of the meeting and add 10 minutes onto the meeting to deal with this issue, so we get all the time?

The Chair: Yes, that's what I would suggest, that we deal with it at the end of the meeting.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I just want to clarify that there might be some conversation or debate around this, or there might not. We just want to make sure that... If you allocate only a minute for it at the end, so that we still get the full two hours, it might go over. So we should perhaps all agree that we have a bit of an extended meeting just so we can deal with it, even if it's, say, 15 minutes. It might go quickly, but we don't want to handcuff ourselves.

• (1505)

The Chair: Absolutely. We're not going to cut into the time of any of our important witnesses while we have them here.

If everyone is all right with that, I'm going to move adjournment of the meeting.

Thank you all very much. We will see you next Tuesday.

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