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Chair: Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Welcome to this meeting, which is basically a continuation of where we were last Tuesday when we were questioning witnesses and then debated a motion.

First of all, I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here. Mr. Wolfish, it's really nice to see you in person. We really appreciate that you've come back for this one hour. It's such an interesting topic and there's so much to learn from all of you.

I can inform the committee that all of the sound tests have been done for the witnesses who are online, so we're essentially ready to go.

We had just started the second round—the five-minute round—when we started debating the motion. We're at the top of the five-minute round.

We'll start with Mr. Leslie for five minutes.

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Last week, the Liberal government finally realized that the carbon tax is punishing Canadians and decided to put a pause on it for home heating for certain voters.

My question is for ECCC. Were you consulted, or was this just a political decision? Second, if you were consulted, when did that process start, and what was the advice given to—

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I question the relevance of the line of questioning.

The Chair: Yes, so do I in fact. I don't think this is relevant.

Mr. Branden Leslie: The carbon tax is most certainly related to—

The Chair: It has nothing to do with waste water. I'm going to rule that out of order.

We have only an hour. We've already interrupted these witnesses once before. I'm sure there will be ample opportunity to talk about carbon pricing.

If you could get back on the topic of the water study, Mr. Leslie, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Sure. Let's start with a CBC news article earlier this year that stated that the federal government is still determining precisely what the Canada water agency will do. It adds that it's unknown how many employees are going to be based there.

What is the CWA actually going to do? How many staff are you going to have? What are they going to do in terms of actually leading water management?

In terms of the reports that we got from the questionnaires by various departments, there's a tremendous amount of duplication, overlap and lack of standardization. With the funding that's been allocated to CWA, is it feasible that it's actually going to provide better coordination relating to water management in this country?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Canada Water Agency, Department of the Environment): Thank you for the question.

The Canada water agency's focus will be on the coordination of efforts on a number of fronts. One will be across the federal house, recognizing that there are over 20 departments that have roles and responsibilities with regard to water.

The second particular focus will be around being able to coordinate with provinces and territories with respect to the federal framework, the roles of provinces and territories in water and the need to collaborate on transboundary waters in particular.

The third area of responsibility we will be focusing on is the engagement and work with indigenous peoples, making sure that we have indigenous people..and that we integrate the indigenous rights framework into the work that we do.

With that, we hope that we are going to be able to respect the roles and responsibilities of provinces while providing leadership on federal policy for water.

Mr. Branden Leslie: How do you hope to be able to do that?

In what process are you actually going to start engaging with the provinces? According to them, they weren't engaged early on in the development of the Canada water agency. At what point and how are you going to go about actually engaging with the provinces to make sure their jurisdiction is respected, particularly in light of their rightful concerns as highlighted by the Supreme Court decision on Bill C-69?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Thank you for the question.

We are conscious of the reference from the Supreme Court. We do respect it, and we will respect it. We started our consultations with the provinces and territories in 2000. We shared a paper called "Toward the Creation of a Canada Water Agency". We held a number of bilateral calls with provinces and territories along the way. We also used the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment to have conversations.

We'll continue to use the CCME as a vehicle for conversations in a multilateral forum. We'll continue to use bilateral discussions, particularly as we implement the freshwater action plan and the mechanisms that we use with provinces and territories to manage the freshwater ecosystem initiatives.

We have an MOU with Manitoba. We have an agreement with Quebec. We have an agreement with Ontario. We'll continue to be working through those agreements and looking to coordinate with provinces on each of the freshwater ecosystems.

• (1105)

Mr. Branden Leslie: What concerns have the provinces laid out to you in those discussions? In the case of Saskatchewan, I suspect they took great issue with Environment Canada trespassing on privately owned farmland to do water sampling last summer.

What other concerns have the provinces laid out in terms of the potential or likelihood of your stepping on their jurisdiction through the Canada water agency?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We recognize that the provinces and territories have an important regulatory role to play with drinking water, with source water and with non-source water protection. We'll continue to respect those rules and responsibilities.

Our job is to work with provinces and territories, stakeholders, partners and indigenous communities around the freshwater action plan. We've identified eight transboundary watersheds across the country that require collaboration and co-ordination. We have \$650 million of funding to help coordinate action in those areas, including around the Great Lakes, St. Lawrence, the Wolatog/St. John River in New Brunswick, Lake Winnipeg basin, the Fraser and the Mackenzie.

We will continue to collaborate with the provinces on identifying priorities and putting in place measures to help with non-point source protection and improving water quality in those areas.

Mr. Branden Leslie: It's been stated that legislation is coming. Is it going to be an agency or a branch under ECCC?

How many people are expected to be employed there? Are they all going to be based out of Winnipeg? When can we expect this operational aspect of the agency to actually happen?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Thank you.

The agency will be created in two steps. We've already taken action on the first step. In June, with my appointment as the acting assistant deputy minister, it became a branch within Environment and Climate Change Canada. I report directly to the deputy minister and I support the minister, as well as the parliamentary secretary to the prime minister on the work that we do within the branch.

The government has committed to tabling legislation to create the stand-alone agency. That legislation will be tabled according to the priorities of the government. When that legislation passes, we'll be able to move forward to create the stand-alone agency reporting directly to the minister.

We have started to build our presence in Winnipeg. We already had a poster out to recruit staff. We have a presence already there working on the Lake Winnipeg basin. We'll continue to build our presence there after the—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Leslie and Mr. Wolfish.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ali.

[*English*]

Mr. Ali, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank the officials for being here today again.

My question is for ECCC.

Environment and Climate Change Canada has an equivalency agreement with Quebec for the implementation of federal wastewater regulations.

My first question in this regard is, how does the federal government ensure accountability?

Ms. Caroline Blais (Director, Forest Products and Fisheries Act, Department of the Environment): Thank you.

In equivalency agreements, we have two mechanisms for evaluating accountability. One is that provinces share information and data on compliance with their regulation, so we can verify the compliance with our regulation. We also have a mechanism to review the equivalency agreement periodically.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

How does the federal government ensure that the province is respecting federal wastewater standards in implementing the regulations on behalf of the federal government?

Ms. Caroline Blais: In the equivalency agreement, it's the same two mechanisms including the mechanism to share the data. Provinces have their accountability for complying with their regulation. They submit that data to us to look at. If an issue is raised, we can discuss with the province when we review the equivalency agreement.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

Is ECCC negotiating equivalency agreements with other provinces?

Ms. Caroline Blais: It is not, at this point. We have two two equivalency agreements. One is with Quebec and one is with Yukon. That's it.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

The federal government has launched a process for amending wastewater regulations, which will ostensibly improve the planning of system maintenance.

Can you update the committee on the status of the process, please?

• (1110)

Ms. Cecile Siewe (Director General, Industrial Sectors and Chemicals Directorate, Department of the Environment): I can take that question.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Cecile Siewe: I can take that question.

We issued what we would call a discussion paper in May of this year for a 60-day consultation period. That consultation period has closed, and we are going to be incorporating those comments into the Canada Gazette, part II, which we hope we are on target to publish next year, in 2024.

If I can take a step back, the amendments were designed to do three main things. One was to improve what we currently have for what we call the "temporary bypass authorization". When the first iteration of the wastewater effluent release regulations went into effect, there were provisions that allowed owners and operators of wastewater systems to get authorization to bypass the treatment for a very specific period of time and discharge undertreated water at the final discharge point while they were undertaking very needed maintenance, repairs and upgrades.

What we realized over the past few years since the regulation went into effect is that we did not have provisions that would allow us to have an awareness and ensure that there was sufficient mitigation to the receiving environment for bypasses that would take place in other parts of the facility but not at the final discharge point.

That's one thing that the regulations have been amended to update.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

In terms of consulting with first nations, one recommendation that emerged from the post-mortem of the 2015 controlled wastewater release in Montreal was to improve the protocol for consulting first nations who might potentially be affected in case of future releases.

What has been done so far in this regard?

Ms. Cecile Siewe: I'm going to share a couple of points about what we currently do; then I will allow my colleague Caroline Blais to add to that.

With respect to any of the bypasses that owners and operators apply for authorization for, they need to send an authorization into ECCC at least 45 days ahead of the planned release. Before that, they need to consult and engage with the local community, including indigenous communities, as to the impacts so that there's awareness and understanding of the impacts on cultural concerns with respect to the bypass. That information has to come with the application for a temporary authorization bypass.

That's one element of consultation that we do. That includes the public, indigenous communities and communities downstream of the treatment. And then—

The Chair: Thank you.

If you can be brief about the recent bypass, please go ahead.

Ms. Cecile Siewe: The recent bypass authorization also included engagements with indigenous communities.

The Chair: Perfect, thank you so much.

We won't be able to go to you, Madame Blais, because we're over time. Somebody else can raise the issue, or you can answer the question when answering something else.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): I want to thank you for coming back to see us; that's very kind of you.

Mr. Wolfish, before today's meeting, I read the written answer that you sent us. Thank you for that as well.

What I understood from your presentation the other day is that you seem to rely heavily on the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, which is a kind of intergovernmental forum under the direction of the environment ministers. However, I couldn't find any information on that forum in the research that I did before this meeting. What value would it add to the Canada water agency? My impression thus far is that nothing comes out of that forum, but the Canada water agency seems to attach considerable importance to it.

Would you please tell us what value it would add to the agency?

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Thank you.

The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment is a council that meets fairly regularly at the deputy level, the ministerial level and at the officials level. There is a working group that does work on water issues. We have been using that forum as a way to have conversations about water. Other departments have also been using that forum as a way to have conversations around water for several years. We will continue to use that as a multilateral forum.

In addition to that, we have been reaching out to provinces and territories on a bilateral level, and then, when necessary as we continue to do our work, we will bring together a committee of officials at the assistant deputy minister level or at the officials level to support water.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I see.

Many departments participate in this forum, the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Yes.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Wolfish, earlier I was somewhat surprised to learn that a number of watersheds had been selected. You said there were eight of them, but I counted only seven. I also noticed that none of those watersheds where money has been invested is located in Quebec.

Would you please justify that?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Actually, one of them is in Quebec; it's the St. Lawrence basin. It's the focus of the St. Lawrence action plan, a joint initiative with the Quebec government. We have an agreement with Quebec on the subject. We also have a budget to support activities in Quebec.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Wolfish and Ms. Pauzé.

Mr. Bachrach, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming back and joining us once again.

I'd like to start with some questions about the watershed security strategy and fund that British Columbia brought forward.

How is it informing the development of the Canada water agency? Could you speak a bit about how the work in British Columbia is informing your work federally?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Thank you.

We've had some initial conversations with British Columbia. I received a briefing last week from British Columbia on their initiatives. We've identified the Fraser basin as one of the ecosystem initiatives. We are looking forward to getting together with British Columbia to work on what some of the priorities are for science, monitoring and restoration activities.

We're just starting those discussions now.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Obviously, when it comes to the national conversation around fresh water, the Great Lakes deserve a focus. They are very important. For some British Columbians, it might seem as if there's a risk they will draw too much of the focus of the Canada water agency eastward.

Are there conversations within ECCC about matching the British Columbia government's commitment to funding freshwater protection?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We haven't moved in that direction yet. At this stage, what we're looking to do is establish the agency and, from there, hold our conversations with provinces and territories around the ecosystem initiatives.

I think one of the reasons Winnipeg was chosen as the headquarters is that it provides a bit more of a diverse view of fresh water across Canada, and of the various needs. It's recognizing that, in Canada, fresh water indeed takes on a very regional focus, and that needs vary across the country.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Could you provide a bit of detail about indigenous co-governance in management, and the role it will play in the Canada water agency?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: That's an important question.

It's one we're just starting to work through. We're developing advice for the minister. We've had some conversations with the Assembly of First Nations. I've also reached out to the regional levels and organizations. I have started to engage with Métis.

We recognize the importance of bringing that into the work of the agency—reviewing the Canada Water Act within the indigenous rights framework. What we want to do is engage with our partners on what that could look like and the issues they want to discuss. From that perspective, we'll take a couple of years to review and modernize the Canada Water Act.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Kram, you have five minutes.

[English]

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for joining us here today, particularly Mr. Wolfish.

I hope you didn't fly all the way back to Ottawa solely on account of the technical issues last week.

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: I'm based here.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay, that's very good.

Has the Canada water agency's head office been finalized in Winnipeg? Is that where you were joining us from last week?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: I was joining you from Winnipeg for a few reasons.

One was to meet the staff there. I was appointed in June, so it was my opportunity to connect with the team.

While there, I also took the opportunity to meet with important indigenous partners and other stakeholders on the work we are doing.

We are starting to build our staff presence in Winnipeg. We posted a recruitment notice for a few officials. Winnipeg being officially selected will depend on Parliament and its decisions about creating the Canada water agency. A subsequent order would be required to officially establish the headquarters in Winnipeg.

• (1120)

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay.

Has the headquarters been finalized, or is that still in the works?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: It's being finalized in the sense that it's being worked into our plans, our priority settings, our funding and our discussions with Treasury Board, but the final decision will rest with Parliament when the legislation to create the agency is tabled.

Mr. Michael Kram: Last week, you mentioned that there was \$21 million allocated to support the creation of the water agency. Are the new offices being created out of that \$21 million?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We're going to be using the offices of Environment and Climate Change Canada for the short term until we build our presence over the next few years, but that money will be used for supporting the mandate of the agency, the partnerships, the collaboration and the coordination, including the engagement of indigenous partners in the work we talked about on co-development.

Mr. Michael Kram: On the website, it says there will also be "regional offices" across the country. Any idea of how many and where...?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Yes. We'll have an office in Dartmouth. We have an office in Quebec, and I'm going there tonight, actually. We'll have an office, a small presence, in Gatineau. We'll have an office in Toronto and in Burlington, an office in Winnipeg—a regional office and a headquarters office—and an office in Vancouver.

Mr. Michael Kram: Last week, you said you were waiting on legislation that will fully establish the Canada water agency as a stand-alone agency. Do you have any idea of what the legislation will look like?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: It will be an administrative act to create the agency, noting that the agency is created and reports to the minister, and it'll talk about the status of the staff, but of course Parliament will have the decisions to make about the final content of the legislation.

Mr. Michael Kram: What happens to the \$21 million to set up the agency if the legislation doesn't pass?

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: If the agency doesn't pass Parliament, we'll work with Treasury Board and with the department around what pieces of that funding can be used in different ways or not used.

More importantly, the work of the agency right now is under way as a branch within Environment and Climate Change Canada, and for that work to engage indigenous peoples on our mandate and the review of the Canada Water Act, those are important pieces that we're continuing to push ahead as a branch within Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay. That's very good.

Mr. Chair, I would like to hand my remaining time over to my colleague Dan Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'd like to move the following motion:

That the committee report to the House of Commons that:

(a) the Prime Minister's public opinion is plummeting because of his inflationary policies and carbon taxes that are driving up the cost of living for Canadians, and as the Prime Minister, he is only concerned about his re-election;

(b) the Prime Minister has announced a measure that will not provide tax relief to 97% of Canadians;

(c) Canadians are still paying his carbon tax on gas, heat and groceries;

(d) The carbon tax will continue to go up every year;

(e) the Prime Minister has doubled-down on his plan to quadruple the carbon tax to 61 cents a litre;

(f) the Liberals, NDP and Bloc, voted to keep the carbon tax—

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Just a second, please.

Mr. van Koeverden has a point of order.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: My point of order is to express to the witnesses that I'm sorry we're doing this again.

The reason you're back, the reason you had to come back and take time out of your precious workdays, is that we had a delay in the previous meeting. It seems like the Conservative members would just like to do that again.

The Chair: That's not really a point of order.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: It shows an absolute disregard for other people's time, absolutely no respect for people and their willingness to come to committee—

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden, it's not—

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: —and I'm extremely disappointed that for some reason they want to play political games during this important meeting. I'm disgusted.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dan Mazier: I had the floor, Chair.

The Chair: Yes. Just a moment.

I'm going to come back to you. I'm pausing just for a second.

Go ahead, Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Mr. Chair, I'll take it back to paragraph (f):

(f) the Liberals, the NDP and Bloc, voted to keep the carbon tax on home heating just one year ago.

The committee recognize that the carbon tax is a tax plan, not an environmental plan, and call on the Liberal Government to immediately abolish Carbon Tax I and Carbon Tax II, and that the committee report its opinion to the House.

• (1125)

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: We have a point of order by Ms. Taylor Roy.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Can we dispense with the reading of the motion? Do we have to...? It's been distributed, right?

The Chair: It would require unanimous consent to dispense with the reading of the motion.

Mr. Dan Mazier: No.

I have the floor.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Mr. Chair, this is an important issue to the Standing Committee on Environment because over the last eight years, the Prime Minister, multiple environment ministers and the entire Liberal government told Canadians that their punishing carbon tax was affordable. They claimed that increasing gas prices by 61¢ a litre was needed to meet their environmental targets. They claimed that increasing the cost of home heating was needed to meet their environmental targets. They claimed that increasing the cost of food production was needed to meet their environmental targets, and the most misleading statement on the carbon tax was that they claimed Canadians would get more money back than they would pay.

None of these statements is true, and even the Prime Minister has started to admit that his carbon tax isn't an environmental plan; it's a tax plan. The Prime Minister finally admitted that his carbon tax was unaffordable. Last week, after noticing that their popularity was sinking, the Liberals announced that they were implementing a temporary pause on their punishing carbon tax, but not for all Canadians. Only some Canadians would qualify for a tax break and 97% of Canadians would not.

When asked why the carbon tax wasn't being removed on all sources of home heating in every province, the Liberal Minister of Rural Economic Development basically told Canadians living in the Prairies that they were being punished because they didn't vote Liberal. That statement was one of the most divisive things I've heard since being elected.

Mr. Chair, as members of the environment committee, we should be alarmed because, for many years, this committee has been misled by the government. The environment minister testified at this committee on March 27 this year that Canadians “get more money back from the federal government than”—

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: I have a point of order.

The Chair: There's a point of order.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: I'm sorry. Wasn't it just five minutes that they had?

The Chair: No. Now we're off to the races on something else, so—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: The five minutes doesn't count.

The Chair: —the five minutes doesn't count. This is a whole new chapter.

We're not—

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: He can just interrupt a study.

The Chair: Yes, you can do that.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Wow. That's really quite rude.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Do you have a point of order?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Yes, I'd like to add something.

I met with some watershed organizations this past summer, and I have some questions for the Transport Canada representatives. I'd like a little cooperation from the Conservatives.

The Chair: Yes, I know. I understand, but that's not a point of order.

Mr. Mazier, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: It's back to me.

Mr. Chair, as members of the environment committee, we should be alarmed because, for many years, this committee has been misled by this government.

The environment minister testified at this committee on March 27 this year that Canadians “get more money back from the federal government than”—

The Chair: There is a point of order.

Yes, Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Are we able to submit our questions in writing to the witnesses, because I also had some questions I wanted to ask [*Inaudible—Editor*]—

The Chair: Just a moment. I'm going to pause for a second to sort out a couple of things.

• (1125)

(Pause)

• (1125)

The Chair: I'll have to get back to you. I've noted the desire to obtain substantive answers, but I have to find out if I can do that and make that request.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: It's only fair to the committee and to the witnesses.

The Chair: Yes, I understand, but we'll get back to you on that.

Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: The environment minister testified at this committee on March 27 this year that Canadians “get more money back from the federal government than what carbon pricing is costing them.”

If Canadians are getting more money back than they paid, then why are the Liberals pausing their carbon tax on home heating?

The environment minister also testified at this committee on May 3, 2022, that a carbon tax “is one of the most effective ways of reducing emissions.”

If the carbon tax is needed to reduce emissions, then why have emissions continued to go up under the Liberal government?

Last year, on March 24, the environment minister bragged to this committee about the carbon tax top-up for rural Canadians. He stated, “There is clearly a rural lens...applied to carbon pricing.”

If rural Canadians were considered, then why did his own government just admit that rural Canadians needed more money?

Earlier this month, the government's own department testified at this committee that the Liberals' second carbon tax, the clean fuel regulations, will disproportionately impact low- and middle-income Canadians. The government knew that its second carbon tax would punish low- and middle-income Canadians, but that didn't bother it. The government plowed ahead with it anyway. It's absolutely shameful.

Never has it been more clear that the carbon tax is not an environmental plan; it's simply a tax plan. Canadians have finally called the government's bluff, and Canadians are counting on us to immediately abolish the carbon tax once and for all.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1130)

The Chair: I have Mr. Deltell, followed by Mr. Kram and Mr. Leslie.

Mr. van Koeverden, do you want to speak to this? Okay. I'm sorry. I didn't see your hand. I apologize for that.

Go ahead, Monsieur Deltell.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Rarely has an announcement by a prime minister been so booed by virtually everybody, starting with the former Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Catherine McKenna, a former member from the Ottawa region and a leading figure in the first wave of this government. She's also identified as the architect of the Liberal carbon tax. We don't share her point of view, but we recognize her as the architect of carbon pricing.

Barely a few hours after the Prime Minister's surprising announcement, Ms. McKenna expressed her regret, sincere regret from someone who believes in the principle of carbon pricing. She believes that imposing a tax on carbon in order to take money out of taxpayers' pockets is a good thing. We don't share that belief. However, she is indeed the architect of the policy that has been implemented by the current Prime Minister.

What did we see last Thursday? A Prime Minister who, after preaching to the entire world for eight years about the importance of carbon pricing, decided to flip-flop and lower the carbon tax for a portion of the population because he was taking a real hit in the polls. We can see the result of that today.

As we say back home, when you're two-faced, you've got four cheeks for slapping. That's why the ecologists, provincial premiers and Canadians are angry. That's the reality.

[English]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'd like to correct the record. The carbon levy on home heating oil has been applied across the country, not just in Atlantic Canada, as stated by the member.

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, the floor is yours.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I presume this is why the Premier of Saskatchewan said they will not collect the carbon tax anymore. It's because this is totally unacceptable and it is focused only on the maritime people. It's not me who said that. It's the Prime Minister, at the press conference, who showed it very clearly.

[Translation]

On Thursday afternoon, the Prime Minister of Canada held a press conference instead of attending question period. Whom did we see at that press conference? Only Liberal members from the Maritimes. Where were the people from Ontario? Where were the people from Quebec? Where were the people from Manitoba? Where were the people from Saskatchewan? No, it's true: there are no Liberals in Saskatchewan. Where were the other Liberal members and ministers?

[English]

They're missing in action, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

They weren't there, and for good reason. It didn't concern them.

The truth is that this makeshift policy is based solely on the fact that the Prime Minister is taking a hit in the polls.

I have a lot of respect and esteem for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. As we say back home, he steps up to the plate. He appeared at oral question period on Friday morning and answered questions. He also appeared on the program *Les coulisses du pouvoir*, where he very politely said there would be no more changes like that one as long as he was minister. Indirectly, he was saying that, if the Prime Minister does it again, he will resign.

I repeat: I very much respect the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change on a personal level. He's also a tough adversary. Personally, I like tough adversaries because they encourage you to do your best.

Our understanding is that he stepped up to the plate to defend a position I believe he didn't really support, but I don't want to presume. He didn't support the idea of permitting the Bay du Nord project either, even though it was the right thing to do for the good of the country. The minister even uttered a veiled threat that he would resign if the Prime Minister did it again.

On the one hand, the architect of this tax policy, an environmental policy, who established and introduced the Liberal carbon tax, isn't happy, and, on the other, the current minister, who's required to implement that policy and, more particularly, forced to implement the reversal announced by the Prime Minister, isn't happy either. Neither one is happy, and rightly so.

We've also heard a great hue and cry from duly elected provincial authorities, who would have liked the whole thing to be cancelled, if possible. That's what we'd like too. At least if we're talking about winter heating, all types of heating should be included. However, the Prime Minister made his decisions based on his partisan political intentions. That isn't how a prime minister should act, particularly with regard to one of his commitments, one of his key policies.

You should've heard all the comments on the weekend from people who don't hate the current prime minister and who acknowledge that the two basic focuses of his approach for the past eight years have been the First Nations and carbon pricing. Now, in a dramatic turn of events, he retreats from carbon pricing. Need I note that he's doing so after insulting everyone who didn't agree with them, starting with the Conservatives? And now he flip-flops because he's taking a hit in the polls.

That's why we're saying that, if the carbon tax is hitting Canadians hard in one part of the country, it's hitting all Canadians across the country, and in every way.

A year ago, more precisely on October 20, 2022, we of the official opposition conducted a one-day debate in the House of Commons on winter residential heating in Canada. We thought—I think it was entirely logical, and the Prime Minister showed last week that we're partly right—that it wasn't a good idea to create and impose a new carbon tax on residential heating in the middle of winter. Who voted against that motion a year ago? The party in power, the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Green Party voted against the motion. In short, we Conservatives were the only ones who thought it wasn't a good idea to impose a new tax on residential heating in Canada in the middle of winter. It was sheer common sense.

The Prime Minister, flanked by members from only one region of Canada, made a makeshift announcement for partisan political purposes. However, as Prime Minister, he speaks on behalf of all Canadians. He managed to sew division among ecologists, provincial political authorities and ordinary Canadians alike but failed to please all Canadians, including Quebecers, of course, who are paying a heavy price.

For all these reasons, we would like to continue debating the motion. We would also like the Prime Minister to be accountable in this matter. We're talking about home heating; it makes no sense to tax Canadians in the middle of winter.

• (1135)

The Chair: Mr. Kram. The floor is yours.

[English]

Mr. Michael Kram: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For four years now, I have heard over and over again in my riding that the carbon tax has been making life less and less affordable for people, particularly when it comes to the cost of home heating. I was very surprised at the announcement last week that the Liberal government was going to pause the carbon tax on home heating, but only for home heating oil and not for natural gas.

Why would that be? Well, with a little bit of research, one can see that in Saskatchewan, all of the home heating is done with natu-

ral gas, whereas in the Atlantic provinces it is primarily done with oil.

I think that certainly raises some questions about why that decision was made. I think the Liberals rural economic development minister, Gudie Hutchings, explained it very clearly this weekend when she said that the Prairies do not elect enough Liberals and, therefore, her government was not going to listen to the people of that region. It really is shameful that affordability and the cost of living are not a concern to this Liberal government when it comes to the people of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, simply because of the way they voted in the last election.

I think the level of divisiveness this government has stooped to is shameful. I fully support the motion by my colleague, Dan Mazier.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kram.

Mr. Leslie.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree. It's a motion worthy of support. I find it interesting that the tax began as revenue-neutral, and then you were getting more back, and now it's being recognized that it is punishing Canadians and needs to be paused—at least until there's an election where the Liberals can try to regain power and reimplement and quadruple the carbon tax. When the polling is down, the Prime Minister scrambles to come up with.... Perhaps if had been able to ask my question earlier, we could have found out that this was driven by departmental officials, but it seems a lot more like a political decision made when polling numbers are down.

It's so typical of this Prime Minister and his need to try to divide Canadians. My colleague across the way points out that the heating oil exemption applies across Canada. That's great—only that 97% of people don't use heating oil. We've picked and chosen in an area in which there are a bunch of Liberal MPs, where polling numbers are down, and we should provide some relief to them. What about my constituents? What about people across the country who are sick and tired of paying a carbon tax?

I know that my colleagues haven't knocked on doors as recently as I have, but I will give you fair warning that in the next election you will find that people despise the carbon tax; that people are hurting; and that people, businesses and families are struggling to get by. They know this is a tax plan, not an environmental plan.

They'll realize that—

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, we have Ms. Taylor Roy.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: I'm sorry. Can we correct a statement, or can we question a statement made here? How can the member say he knows that we have not been knocking on doors as recently as he has?

I'd like to know how you know that, Mr. Leslie.

Mr. Branden Leslie: I was in a byelection more recently than your federal election.

The Chair: Order, please.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: I knock on doors regularly.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Branden Leslie: That's good, although I'm surprised that you're not more aware.

The Chair: A point of order has to be related to the rules. It can't be used to counter statements, however false or unproven they may be.

I'll let you continue, Mr. Leslie.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Mr. Chair, can I ask a question, then?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: How do we do that? How do we counter a false statement or narrative that's being put out?

The Chair: When you get the floor....

Do you want to be on the list?

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: No, thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Leslie.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was very pleasantly surprised that the Prime Minister did recognize the pain that his carbon tax is imposing on Canadians, that he climbed down from his high horse at least long enough to pause it for certain Canadians. I hope he will come to his senses, as prairie leaders, premiers and political leaders across this country are highlighting that it is unfair. It divides Canadians. It's time to scrap the carbon tax—both the first and second—in its entirety, and passing this motion is a good place to start.

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the opportunity to correct some facts that were just bandied about by the members opposite for the last little while. I regret that I have to do this, but unfortunately, they are either willfully ignorant of the facts or extremely enthusiastic about misleading Canadians.

The pause on the carbon levy on a product—home heating oil—is not specific to one region. Home heating oil is the dirtiest way to heat your home. It is extremely inefficient. We used to have an oil furnace in our house and now we don't, and I can tell you with certainty that not having it is a far more efficient and less dirty way.

It's like living on a cruise ship. A cruise ship runs on a similar kind of oil. It's archaic. It's the way that we heated homes in the

1800s. We don't need to do that anymore. We have better technology and we're encouraging people to get off home heating oil.

They keep saying it's only specific to Atlantic Canada, and that's absolutely false. There are more people in the province of Quebec who use home heating oil than there are in Atlantic Canada. Quebec is a much bigger province. There is no federal carbon levy in Quebec, which is something my colleagues opposite consistently like to ignore.

Around 20% of Nova Scotians use home heating oil, so there is a low-hanging fruit opportunity to correct that and to work with our neighbours in Atlantic Canada. In order to work with them, we are giving them a bit of a break on the cost of home heating oil, which has been inflated by lots of factors, including the war in Europe. This is a good way to do that.

Some 60% of Yukoners still heat their homes with home heating oil, and these changes will reflect that. There is no added benefit for Atlantic Canadians. Any province or territory that would like to sign up for the heat pump program can, and other provinces have so far.

Heat pumps are an extraordinarily efficient way of heating one's home. We are not living in the 1800s anymore, and we ought to work on the low-hanging fruit of home heating, which includes heating oil. I am proud that this government has taken that step.

For the record, being an MP in a rural community, I'm also thrilled.... The members opposite always think it's hilarious that Milton is rural. I encourage you to come, Mr. Leslie. We might not be as rural as southern Saskatchewan, but we have lots of farms. I have lots of constituents on home heating oil, and I have been pushing for an increase to the rural top-up. It's a welcome change because, indeed, it costs a bit more. A 20% rural top-up is a welcome change for rural Canadians.

Let's get back to work.

• (1145)

The Chair: I have Madame Chatel.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank my colleague Mr. Deltell for praising the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. I wholeheartedly agree with him that he's an excellent minister.

As chair of the liberal rural caucus, I can tell you there has been a lot of discussion. It's not always easy for Canadians living in rural areas to transition to a more environmental and ecological type of heating, or to electric vehicles. These people need a little more time and support to make the transition with the help, for example, of the oil to heat pump affordability program, which applies across country, which is important. So I think the three-year pause reflects that reality.

Of course, when provinces add their contribution to that of the federal government, that makes it easier to offer grants for transitioning to heat pumps. So I hope that all Canadian provinces will participate actively in this process so the same programs can be provided to all Canadians from sea to sea.

With that, I'd like to know whether we can now vote on the motion so we can then move on to our freshwater study.

The Chair: Since you are last on the speakers list, we could proceed with the vote.

I assume we want a recorded vote.

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I would prefer that we go back to hearing from our witnesses, personally.

The Chair: Yes, but let's have the vote and then we can do that. That's what I would suggest. Why don't we do that? We'll have the vote and then we'll still have some time.

Mr. Kram has 30 seconds left. I'll be very strict on that. I'm sure you'll appreciate why. We'll then go to Mr. Longfield.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: Mr. Kram, you have 30 seconds.

Mr. Michael Kram: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll go back to Mr. Wolfish.

Does the Canada water agency's mandate include groundwater, and specifically water drawn from wells for use on farms?

The Chair: Be very brief please.

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We will not be taking over the responsibilities of others, and NRCan is currently responsible for groundwater.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay.

I think I am out of time, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Pretty much.

Mr. Longfield, you have five minutes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the officials for sitting with us through that. I hope we can get back to our topic of discussion now that we've cleared that off our table.

For Mr. Wolfish, 58 formerly pristine lakes around the Kenora area were managed since 1968, and in an unexpected and controversial move, in 2012 the Conservative federal government defunded the facility. It was the Experimental Lakes Area and now it's be-

ing managed by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, and I believe they're also out of Winnipeg.

I used to canoe a lot in that area. I'm from Winnipeg originally. Knowing the importance of research on fresh water, I'm wondering how will the Canada water agency interact with IISD-ELA?

● (1150)

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: I'll start with the answer and then I will turn to my colleague to supplement the answer.

As the first step what I would say is that the experimental lakes did receive funding in budget 2023 as part of the overall investment in the freshwater action plan.

In terms of our collaborations with IISD, they're based in Winnipeg. The headquarters of the CWA will be in Winnipeg. We've had conversations around collaboration and opportunities for training and growth and connections, so that conversation will continue to happen as we proceed.

With the particulars around the experimental lakes, Arash, do you have anything to add or should we come back with a written answer?

Dr. Arash Shahsavarani (Director, Water Quality Monitoring and Surveillance Division, Department of the Environment): We can come back with a written answer.

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: We'll come back with a written answer on this one if that's possible.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you. That's going to be key.

As we look at Canada, that's going to be very key for other areas to learn from as well.

Ms. Ladell, maybe to start with you—and it also relates to Ms. Blais. When I was living in Manitoba I did a lot of work on hydroelectric dams up the Churchill and Nelson rivers. Lake Winnipeg was the big reservoir for all the hydroelectric facilities, and Lake Manitoba also, taking all the water from east of the Rocky Mountains into the watershed, which ultimately fuelled our power in Manitoba through the hydroelectric dams.

There is always a lot of controversy about the lake level and how that lake level is managed with indigenous communities living on the lake, with other communities living on the lake, with southern Lake Manitoba's being flooded when Manitoba Hydro would control the level of Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg.

How do we manage the hydroelectric needs of Canada at the same time as respecting the rights of indigenous people and others living on our lakes?

Ms. Kate Ladell (Director General, Ecosystems Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you for that really good question.

I think there is not a simple and straightforward answer. I think it's one that involves multiple players and multiple considerations.

I will turn to my colleague for Ontario and prairie region, who has some on-the-ground experience more specific to the question you're asking.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great. Thank you.

We have about a minute and a half and this is my last question. I know there has been a lot of history on this, but I think it would be important for our study to get some testimony.

Ms. Hilary Oakman (Acting Regional Director, Aquatic Ecosystems, Ontario and Prairie Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): The issue of water levels, of course, and water control is shared between Environment and Climate Change Canada and the province. Where Fisheries and Oceans Canada has an interest is when those water levels may have an impact on fish and fish habitat. That's the extent of the Fisheries and Oceans' responsibilities, and we work closely with our colleagues in the other departments.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great. Thank you.

Ms. Blais, do you have any more to add?

Ms. Caroline Blais: No. I'll look to my colleagues on water levels.

Sorry.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Okay, thank you.

I know we have a lot of experts here and I appreciate your time and your hanging in there with us.

Mr. David Harper (Director General, Monitoring and Data Services Directorate, Department of the Environment): That is no problem.

We actively work with the provinces and territories to monitor levels and flows across the country through a cost-share program. The data related to flows in systems where there are hydro facilities are actively monitored and shared with the public.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The hydrological data, mapping and forecasting of what would happen if we change our power requirements is all done through that.

Mr. David Harper: Yes.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: Can I add a last piece here?

• (1155)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Yes.

Mr. Daniel Wolfish: There is an agreement. It's the master agreement on apportionment via the Prairie Provinces Water Board. The Canada water agency houses the secretariat and helps chair the discussions. That helps the discussions around the apportionment of water through the basin across the three provinces.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me 23 extra seconds.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Longfield, for those questions.

We're essentially at the end of our first hour. I was hoping we'd get two rounds in, but we only got one complete round in, which isn't bad.

We're now going to break to switch to in camera, but I want to thank the witnesses for making themselves available on two occasions to answer questions. They were good questions from all parties, I thought. I want to thank everyone here and online for making themselves available today, in addition to last Tuesday.

With that, I'm going to—

Go ahead, Madame Pauzé.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Have we come to my turn?

The Chair: No. We just finished the first round of speakers with Mr. Longfield. We were about to start the second round. It's not worth it because there's only one minute left.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Would the second round have been two times five minutes and two times two and a half minutes?

The Chair: Yes.

[*English*]

Mr. Shafqat Ali: There's no translation.

The Chair: Okay.

With that, I will suspend, because it is noon. That's what the agenda calls for.

Thank you again for being here. We hope to see you again in the not-too-distant future.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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