

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuesday, July 28, 2020

Via Teleconference

Appointments to Agencies, Boards and Commissions

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HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Brendan Maguire, Chair
Suzanne Lohnes-Croft, Vice-Chair
Bill Horne
Rafah DiCostanzo
Brad Johns
Larry Harrison
Kendra Coombes
Claudia Chender

[Hon. Tony Ince replaced Brendan Maguire for a portion of the meeting]

In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, TUESDAY, JULY 28, 2020

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

10:00 A.M.

CHAIR

Mr. Brendan Maguire

VICE-CHAIR

Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

THE CHAIR: Hello, everybody. It's Brendan Maguire here. I'm the Chair of the Standing Committee on Human Resources. Today, we will consider appointments for ABCs - agencies, boards, and commissions. I'm asking that everybody keep their phone on mute unless they're called upon by myself or one of the staff here.

I'm going to take a quick roll call.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: We'll start with the ABC appointments. Is there anyone who wants to speak up?

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: For the Department of Business, I move that the following be appointed to the Peggy's Cove Commission: Janice Steeles as a member, Nicole Campbell as Vice-Chair and member, Peter Richardson as Chair and member, and Karren Fader as a member.

THE CHAIR: Are there any questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried. Anyone else?

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: For the Department of Environment, I move that the following be appointed to the Round Table on the Environment and Sustainable Prosperity: Scott Skinner as member and Chair, John Crace and Angeline M.B. Gillis as members.

THE CHAIR: Are there any questions?

BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Chair, as the Critic for the Department of Environment, I just want the record to reflect - I know there are currently 15 vacancies on the Environment and Sustainable Prosperity committee. This will fill three of those, and two of those being reappointments, so there is really only one new appointment. It still leaves 12 vacant seats on that committee. I just want the record to reflect that.

I'm really very disappointed. Last year, the government called an emergency meeting on climate change and talked about how important it was to address the issues around climate. Here we are today making appointments to that committee and we're only making three appointments - two of them are reappointments - and still there are 12 outstanding vacancies on that committee.

I just want the record to show that the PC caucus and I, as the Environment Critic, are very disappointed that we didn't have more applicants come forward, and more appointments today.

THE CHAIR: Duly noted. Anyone else?

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I would echo the concern of my colleague around the remaining vacancies. I do want to say that I think we're pleased to see the reappointment of Mr. Skinner and Mr. Crace. They have been longstanding members of that board and have done a good job in that capacity, but it's true that this round table is a very important one.

In the past, it has been one that represents all sectors of the environment and the environment-impacting industries. It has been unusual in that way in that we have a lot of players at the table and the ability to really have conversations that have far-reaching consequences.

I agree that with 12 vacancies, that's not going to get up and running - not to mention the fact that there has been continual delay in the appointment process for this particular board. In times past, we've waited a year or two past expiration to reappoint members. I think it's important that the record shows that we're eager to see this round table up and running at full capacity as soon as possible.

THE CHAIR: Duly noted. I would add that you're both right - it is an extremely important committee. I think we all have very extensive connections within the community. Maybe what we could do as committee members and individual MLAs is reach out to our connections. I personally don't know why, but we could encourage some of those individuals that we know who we think would fit well on this board to apply.

BRAD JOHNS: Thank you for your comments. I would suggest two things. First of all, although I personally - and I'm sure other MLAs - have no problem making references, there were 34 applicants who came forward for this. When we have brought up issues on the floor or in different committees, we're basically told that it's a responsibility of the government to do that.

During the sitting of the House when the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act was passed, the minister did commit that he would be out doing consultations and meeting with groups and all that come September. Obviously, the fact there are still 12 vacancies to this committee doesn't bode well on meeting the commitments that he made in the House.

Once again, there were 34 applicants that came forward for this board, so it's not that there was a lack of people who came forward. It's that there were only three people who are being recommended.

THE CHAIR: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Is there anyone else?

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: For the Department of Health and Wellness, I move that Rilla Banks be appointed as a member to the Board of the Nova Scotia College of Chiropractors.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion? Brad Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: I'm wondering if the clerk can confirm this or not: Does this board pay \$300 per meeting?

JUDY KAVANAGH: I don't know. That would be in the ABCs package you were sent.

BRAD JOHNS: I do believe it does. I'd just like the record to reflect that applicants to this board are paid \$300 plus expenses per meeting.

THE CHAIR: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Is there anything else?

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: For the Department of Health and Wellness, I move that Trevor McGowan be appointed as a public representative to the Nova Scotia College of Counselling Therapists.

THE CHAIR: Are there any questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: For the Department of Health and Wellness, I move the following be appointed as public representatives to the Council of the College of Paramedics of Nova Scotia: Nicholas Burke, Dr. Caitlin Lees, and Andrew Nemirovsky.

THE CHAIR: Are there any questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Are there any more ABCs?

BILL HORNE: For the Department of Justice, I move that Aimee Virick be appointed as a member to the Licensed Professional Planners Association.

THE CHAIR: Are there any questions? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

I did receive a few text messages. I will recognize the NDP caucus. They want to put something forward.

KENDRA COOMBES: I would like to put forward a motion for consideration of the committee. I'll read the motion and then I'll speak to it:

I move that the committee write a letter to the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education calling on him to immediately:

- 1) Review and revise criteria for post-secondary board appointments to ensure greater alignment between appointee experience and the interests and history of the institutions they are to serve.
- 2) Design and institute with university community involvement a diversity strategy for post-secondary governance that includes the recognition of systemic racism in post-secondary institutions and the initiation of anti-racist action planning at the leadership level.

Nova Scotia universities are crucial pillars of our province whose governance requires transparency, accountability, and diversity of perspective. Students and faculty voices are critical in this process. Recent events at NSCAD University have underscored broader concerns with university governance that must be addressed.

As universities navigate the physical and logistical challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and rise to meet the demands, both new and old, of the BIPOC communities asking for change, university leadership must remain responsive and accountable.

THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion?

CLAUDIA CHENDER: You should all have that in your emails.

[10:15 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: I'm just checking to see if I have it in my email. I apologize.

Can I take five minutes? I'm trying to find it in my email, and I can't find it. Is it possible to have it sent again?

Rafah.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I wanted to recess, Mr. Chair, for five minutes as well. I need to read the exact details. I did not read it ahead of time. I apologize.

JUDY KAVANAGH: I have just sent it out to members a few minutes ago to members and researchers. You're seeing it for the first time now.

SUZANNE-LOHNES-CROFT: That's why we can't find it. (Laughter)

JUDY KAVANAGH: You should have it by now.

THE CHAIR: Is the committee okay if we just take five minutes to look it over?

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

[10:17 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:23 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Okay. That was actually seven minutes.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Chair, I'm still trying to figure out what exactly it involves. Can I have another five minutes, if possible?

THE CHAIR: Yes. We'll do another five minutes.

[10:24 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:31 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Are we ready to go?

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Yes, we're ready to go. I would like to say that this government has ensured more diversity to the bench and various boards to deputy heads. We have also committed to ensure the balance of representation on all fronts.

The NDP had the opportunity to diversify boards and enact these recommendations when they were in government, and they chose not to. Therefore, we will not be in agreement with this motion.

THE CHAIR: Claudia.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: The NDP hasn't been in government in seven years so I don't think that argument holds much water in terms of what's before us. We're not talking about specifically diversifying agencies, boards, and commissions. If you heard my colleague, the member for Cape Breton Centre, and looked at the motion, what we are in fact suggesting is that the criteria for the appointment of people to university boards in particular - and I might say that Nova Scotia has 11 different Acts governing universities, whereas most other provinces have one. We have a very complicated system. We have 11 different boards governing our 11 universities.

The criteria for the government appointments to those boards, of which every board has some, have nothing to do with the aim, purpose, or objectives of that institution. Rather, they mirror the requirements for corporate boards. They look for people with expertise in finance, accounting, and other things - all of which is important, but what we've seen in the recent controversy over the firing of the NSCAD president by the board is that there is often a massive gulf between the interests of the university community and leadership and

faculty, and the governance of that institution. That has, in fact, brought us time and time again into very difficult and very opaque situations.

One simple way to remedy that, we think, is to simply change the criteria by which those appointments are made. That is what we are suggesting in part here. I just wanted to clarify that motion.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: To say that because a previous government didn't do something when they were in power certainly doesn't justify not doing something now. I think that's a bit of a cop-out reason, to be honest. I do support the motion the NDP is bringing forward. I think that it is timely, given the circumstances and current events, so I do think that it's a timely motion.

I would point out for members that this is a request to send a letter to the minister. Therefore, I would assume as previous letters to previous ministers, what we will receive back to the committee is a response to the motion and the minister will respond to us.

I don't think we, the PC caucus, have any concerns with regard to the motion. What I would say is that it may be beneficial to actually look at splitting the motion into two parts. It is two different things. The second part - I think it would be nice to see the institutions be able to do the review that's requested in the first half and then reply.

Having said that, I think both of these parts are timely. As I said, the motion is to write a letter to the minister - the minister will reply back to the committee - and I see no harm whatsoever in requesting that. The PC caucus supports the motion.

THE CHAIR: Kendra.

KENDRA COOMBES: I'd also like to add that this motion is also in line with what faculty and students have been asking for over the past few years, but specifically over the last few months. I think that those who are attending all universities, as well as teaching at them, should have a say in the governance of the boards.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: This government will continue to review all appointments with a gender lens and a diversity lens. I call this to a vote.

THE CHAIR: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is defeated.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: It's a tie, Mr. Chair.

JUDY KAVANAGH: Given that this is done by teleconference, perhaps we should read names.

BRAD JOHNS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Go ahead.

JUDY KAVANAGH: Would you like me to read the names or would you prefer to, Mr. Chair?

THE CHAIR: There were four against and four in favour, so it's a tie, so we have to go to a tie breaker, which would fall on me, right?

JUDY KAVANAGH: Is the committee agreed that four of them voted yes and four of them voted no?

BRAD JOHNS: I would like a roll call done officially, please.

JUDY KAVANAGH: That's the Chair's decision to make, but that would be my advice.

THE CHAIR: We can certainly do that, but it sounded to me like four people voted for and four people voted against, and it was decided that it was a tie. It's up to the Chair to break that tie. My vote is no, so the tie is broken.

Does the Progressive Conservative Party have a motion?

BRAD JOHNS: We do, Mr. Chair. I'm seeing articles and editorials almost daily in the news and online by Nova Scotians who have questions and concerns regarding this coming school year. There seems to be a sense of confusion, a sense of concern by Nova Scotia parents, students, teachers and MLAs. I think we're all interested in a safe and prudent reopening of the schools and the plan that's coming forward.

It does fall as a matter pertaining to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. It's within the mandate of this committee, so I believe it's incumbent that the committee helps the department in its effort to communicate the reopening plan to Nova Scotians and to parents.

Therefore, I would like to make the following motion: I move that the committee invite the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to our August 25, 2020 meeting, extending to them an opportunity to present information on Nova Scotia's back-to-school plan prior to the planned reopening of schools on September 8th.

THE CHAIR: I will say this - and this is just my own feeling as Chair, to deal with setting up witnesses. I do know heading into August and September for the Department of

Education and Early Childhood Development, it's probably one of their busiest times. Maybe we can have a discussion around this, but I don't know - and this is just my own feeling - if it would be wise to pull the department away for the massive amount of work that they have to do to prepare for the committee.

We could potentially ask for a letter. That might be a lot easier for an explanation. If we want to have discussion about that, we certainly can. It's not my decision to make. I just feel like, as a father of three, I would prefer to have those experts and individuals on the front line with teachers, with the NSGEU, and with the resources to ensure they're able to deal with anything that comes up.

Rafah.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Chair, I believe we can make this part of the agenda-setting, but we have to decide on it when we set the agenda. We can refer this to the agenda-setting meeting.

BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Chair, can I make a comment, please.

THE CHAIR: You certainly can.

BRAD JOHNS: These meetings are so frustrating, Mr. Chair. Respectfully, first of all, the role of the Chair is to chair the meeting, not to provide personal opinions. In fact, as a Chair, the Chair is supposed to have no opinions until it comes to a vote.

Second of all, Mr. Chair, if I could, it's a motion I have just put before the committee. I would like to have a motion made, see if it's seconded, have the proper debate on it, and then call the question on the motion. I find it very frustrating the way that some of these meetings are done and the position that you take as Chair during these meetings, respectfully.

As should be done, a motion has been placed. We should ask if there is a seconder . . .

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: Proper protocols, please, Mr. Chair, proper protocols.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Johns, I ask that you let me respond to that. I will say that I do have a vote. I did not at any point, to be very clear, shut down discussion or stop the motion from coming to the floor.

As an MLA that represents 20,000 people, and as a father of three children, who are all in the education system, as a Nova Scotian, I have a right to an opinion. My opinion does not sway this committee one way or another. To say that it does is in fact wrong. I

don't think I have swayed your opinion. I don't think I swayed Kendra's or Claudia's or anyone on the Liberal side. After I said what I said, I opened the floor up to discussion and, as I stated, the committee can then decide which way they want to go.

With that, I did recognize Rafah DiCostanzo. There is a point that's on the floor now, and you guys can have at it and have a discussion.

BRAD JOHNS: If I could, I am requesting - and this is aside from the motion - that proper protocols for running meetings be followed in this committee. I sat on well over 50 different boards and committees - community, municipal, and provincial - and I have never sat on a committee that is run anything like this whatsoever.

Perhaps for our next meeting, if we could follow proper protocols for meetings, I would find that very beneficial. That's a comment, and I would go back to the motion.

[10:45 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: I'm sure we'll take that under consideration.

There is a motion on the floor - yes, Rafah.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: I would like to make a motion that his suggestion be put onto the agenda-setting meeting.

THE CHAIR: Would all those in favour of the motion . . .

BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Chair, you can't put another motion on the floor when there's a motion on the floor.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Johns, I asked that you allow me to respond. The first motion is on the floor. We are voting on that first motion. Then we will vote on the motion put forward by Ms. DiCostanzo.

Instead of reacting, please let me explain - there is a motion on the floor put there by you. We will vote on that motion and then we will vote on the motion by Rafah DiCostanzo.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I would just like to speak to the motion around calling the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to appear at the August 25th meeting. I would say that the NDP caucus supports this motion.

I would make a comment that the rationale of not having them appear because August is a busy time for school mirrors the rationale for not having the Health Committee meet because everyone in health is too busy to appear at a committee. I would remind the committee and people listening that committee-meeting hours are maximum two hours

long and that they exist to inform Members of the Legislative Assembly - and by extension Nova Scotians - about important aspects of government business.

So the idea that a department with hundreds of people couldn't make two hours to present plans to a committee, in my opinion, is not sufficient rationale for not calling them to appear. I think that it's of the utmost urgency that Nova Scotians have the best possible information around school reopening.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms. Chender. There is a motion on the floor put forward by Mr. Johns of the Progressive Conservative Party.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

We are at a tie. I will be voting no.

The motion is defeated.

There is also another motion on the floor to bring up this topic at committee agenda setting by Ms. DiCostanzo. Would all those in favour of the motion . . .

BRAD JOHNS: Discussion on that motion. Through you to the clerk, when would that meeting for agenda setting be?

JUDY KAVANAGH: We still have two sets of witnesses on our last agenda. If the committee decides to proceed with those, then I'll bring them in as soon as we're hearing from witnesses again. It's up to the committee. They can decide to scrap the old agenda and hold a new agenda setting or add to the ones we already have. It's up to the committee really.

BRAD JOHNS: I guess there isn't much sense in supporting or voting for or against the motion that's now on the floor because by that time, schools have gone back in - so it seems somewhat of a moot point, but thank you.

THE CHAIR: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

I recognize the NDP caucus.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: Mr. Chair, we have another motion also in relation to schools. I will put forward the motion and then I'll speak to it. Our motion is that we move that the committee hold a forum as soon as possible to allow stakeholders to present to this committee to bring forward recommendations for improvement to the school reopening plan, which the committee can then bring forward to the minister.

I'll speak to this and it might take me a minute. You should have this in your mailboxes as I'm speaking if people want to take a look at it.

Last week we saw the government's plan for reopening schools in September. That plan is essentially an outline. The plan says that it prioritizes safety, but there are a lot of details that are not included in that plan. Our caucus, along with teachers, staff, families, and our colleagues - who we have heard from already this morning - have many concerns and unanswered questions about what the plan actually looks like.

We have concerns about the reliance on past cohorting because we know that even though they may be in a cohort in a classroom, they might be in a different cohort on a bus and again in extracurriculars and again at home. We haven't seen any guidelines at all about before- and after-school care. We want to see the government make the necessary interventions to ensure the safe reopening of schools. We have heard about investments in technology, but we have no clue about investments in cleaning and its base in staffing.

Given the importance of this issue, given the importance of all the stakeholders concerned, I'm putting forward a motion that the committee hold a forum on the plan for reopening schools to allow stakeholders - including the NSTU, school advisory councils, and others - to provide the committee with suggestions that we can put in front of the minister.

I'll just take a moment to let the committee know that there is a precedent for standing committees of the Legislature to do this. On June 24, 2004, the Standing Committee on Community Services held a full-day forum on family violence, which included presentations and a round table discussion. The committee held a second forum on this topic in 2005.

At the 2005 agenda-setting meeting of the Community Services committee, Stephen McNeil, the member for Annapolis - now the Premier - made the suggestion that the committee hold a forum on poverty and income assistance rates. As a result, a number of forums, all on poverty, happened in Winter 2006. On September 23, 2008, the Community Services committee also held a forum on disabilities.

My point is that as a committee, we have the ability to convene a broader discussion on a topic with stakeholders and members of the public. We know that there was an electronic form sent out to parents, but with all due respect, everyone that I have heard from felt that that engagement was insufficient.

In closing, as the member for Annapolis explained in 2005, this forum can give us "... a general sense of what we can do as a committee to put ideas in front of the minister to improve that situation."

THE CHAIR: Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: The PC caucus supports this. I think that it's similar to the motion we brought forward. I think that it is of utmost concern to be able to address some of the concerns that parents, teachers, and students have and to receive feedback. It's prudent to listen to their concerns and to address some of them and try to alleviate some of the stress that parents, teachers, and students are currently feeling. The PC caucus does support this motion.

THE CHAIR: Any other comments? Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I would just like to ask Ms. Chender how she sees a forum playing out. How will we do this? Will it be an online forum? How is it to be organized? Can she give me some ideas? She has obviously put some thought into this.

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I appreciate the question. I think we are somewhat open as to the format. I would suggest probably that we give people a few weeks of advance notice, and then we can hold it over whatever videoconferencing platform Legislative TV would recommend. We have seen a number of these kinds of forums over the last months - on Zoom and WebX and other platforms. We could have the Chair of the committee perhaps and maybe another couple of members of the committee from each caucus as appointed, open it up to discussion, have a few questions, and just give people the chance to offer feedback and have a short conversation. I think it would be great if we could have someone from the department, whether that be the deputy or an executive director, present to hear and assimilate that feedback.

If this motion is approved, then I would be happy to flesh out our proposal for the committee.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I'm just wondering - the survey that was put out by the department had 28,000 people respond. Do you not think that's a good indication of people voicing what their concerns were?

CLAUDIA CHENDER: I think it's great that parents were able to respond, and I certainly hope that the views of those parents were included. However, we have heard from many folks in more organizational capacities - in particular the school advisory councils, which were really singled out during the changes to education that happened a few years ago as the kind of focal point for school decision-making - that they were almost completely left out, except to the degree that they filled that out as an individual parent. I think that there is lots more feedback on a school region and regional centre level that may not have had an opportunity to come forward.

The second piece is that all of that happened in a vacuum. For one thing, it happened some time ago when the epidemiology of COVID was different in our communities. Also, it happened in absence of any specific plan or outline to talk about. We now have the outline of a plan that has been presented by government. I think it's an opportunity to respond to that plan in particular and make suggestions for improvement.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I think the department has really . . .

THE CHAIR: One second, Suzanne. Before we continue, we are allotted from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. I think that was the time for the committee meeting. We are four minutes away from 11 o'clock. I ask the clerk, will we need consent to go past 11 o'clock?

JUDY KAVANAGH: Yes. As long as the committee agrees, either by consensus or a vote, that's okay.

THE CHAIR: Do we want to extend the meeting till 11:30 a.m.? Okay. Mr. Johns, would you like to put a motion on the floor?

BRAD JOHNS: I move that the committee extend for an additional half-hour till 11:30 a.m.

THE CHAIR: Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

I apologize for interrupting, Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: I really feel the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will continue to work really closely with stakeholders. I think that survey demonstrates that. This is ongoing. They will continue to seek valuable feedback from the Teachers Union, from parents, from principals, from RECs. I think we really have to put faith in the minister and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to carry this forward.

THE CHAIR: The motion is on the floor. Unless there's any more discussion? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

It's a tie. I'll break the tie with a Nay.

The motion is defeated.

Does anyone else have any other motions left?

KENDRA COOMBES: I do, Mr. Chair.

THE CHAIR: Please proceed.

KENDRA COOMBES: I put forward another motion for the consideration of the committee. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored what has been long known by most people: Front-line workers make our society run. The government has left it up to

employers to decide who qualifies for the Essential Health Care Workers Program and has said that only those who perform publicly-funded care and who provide direct care will receive payments and possibly not until October. This means great confusion and exclusion. As many are left trying to find out whether they are in or out, many essential workers have been told that they are definitely out; for example, administrative workers in some health care environments. This wage top-up should be made available widely to all health care workers who provided essential care during the public health emergency.

I move that the committee write a letter to the Minister of Health and Wellness calling on him to immediately:

1. Provide a list of employers and positions that qualify to the committee.
2. Expand the essential worker top-up to all essential workers.

THE CHAIR: Kendra, which department are we sending this to?

KENDRA COOMBES: The Department of Health and Wellness.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Mr. Chair, can we take a five-minute break? There are so many motions, and I would like to see that one in writing, please.

SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: It's in your email.

THE CHAIR: We'll take a five-minute recess for the members to review the motion.

[11:01 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:03 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: I just answered the other line. It was my foster dad, and there has been a death in the family, one of the kids that was just born. I have to go.

BRAD JOHNS: Mr. Chair, I would suggest you excuse yourself, and perhaps the Vice-Chair could take over.

[11:03 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[11:15 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: We will do a roll call of members. This is Suzanne Lohnes-Croft. I'm taking over as Chair.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: I do have a member who is calling in. Minister Ince is going to replace . . .

BRAD JOHNS: Madam Chair, if I could, I object to the fact that - I recognize the fact that the Chair had to leave. I do object to the fact that another member is being floated in here in the middle of the meeting, particularly given the fact that at our previous meeting, I did discuss the fact that there was a vacant seat with the Liberal members of the committee. I did address at the last meeting and requested to have that seat filled for this meeting, particularly given the fact that there are 26 Liberals. The meeting went forward.

There was a committee membership list that was sent out. On that list, it still continued for today's meeting showing a vacant seat. I do object to having somebody floated in now at the last minute who hasn't been here for the whole meeting. I go through you to legal counsel to see whether or not that's even proving to be able to do that. I would like clarification if I could from legal on this.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Hebb.

GORDON HEBB: There's no problem with a substitution in the middle of a meeting - for the Chair who left. You can't, of course, substitute for the vacant seat.

THE CHAIR: So Mr. Ince would have to Chair not me as the Vice-Chair?

GORDON HEBB: No, just because he's substituting doesn't make him the Chair. You would still be the Chair.

THE CHAIR: Are we allowed to bring Mr. Ince in?

GORDON HEBB: Yes, you are.

THE CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Are you clear on that, Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: Yes, Madam Chair, although I still object to it and don't feel that it's correct, given the fact that there is a vacant seat that was available to be filled, was addressed at our previous meeting, and was not filled for this meeting, but I take the advice of legal counsel.

THE CHAIR: Duly noted, Mr. Johns.

Can the clerk - since I was not chairing, where did we leave off?

JUDY KAVANAGH: I think there was a motion on the table already. I believe it was Ms. Chender's motion.

THE CHAIR: Was it Ms. Coombes?

JUDY KAVANAGH: Yes, it was one about the Department of Health and Wellness.

KENDRA COOMBES: Madam Chair, do you want me to reread that for Mr. Ince's knowledge?

THE CHAIR: I think Mr. Ince is now on. Mr. Ince, are you present?

HON. TONY INCE: I am.

THE CHAIR: Okay, Mr. Ince is here. Can you please read your motion again?

KENDRA COOMBES: I will.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored what has been long known by most people: Front-line workers make our society run. The government has left it up to employers to decide who qualifies for the Essential Health Care Workers Program and has said that only those who perform publicly-funded care and who provide direct care will receive payments and possibly not until October. This means great confusion and exclusion, as many are left trying to find out whether they are in or out. Many essential workers have been told that they are definitely out; for example, administrative workers in some health care environments. The wage top-up should be made available widely to all health care workers who provided essential care during the public health emergency.

I move that the committee write a letter to the Minister of Health and Wellness calling on him to immediately:

1. Provide a list of employers and positions that qualify to the committee.
2. Expand the essential worker top-up to all essential workers.

THE CHAIR: There is a motion on the floor. Mr. Johns.

BRAD JOHNS: The PC caucus does support this motion. I know myself, personally, as an MLA, would find this beneficial to have the clarification to be able to explain to my constituents who qualifies and who doesn't, and why certain essential workers qualify and others do not. I would find this beneficial, and the PC caucus does support this.

THE CHAIR: Are we ready for the vote? Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is defeated.

Ms. DiCostanzo.

RAFAH DICOSTANZO: Madam Chair, I would like to adjourn. I had to stay another 20 minutes. I have another appointment, and they're waiting for me. If we're done with the motions, I would like to adjourn this meeting.

THE CHAIR: There is a motion on the floor to adjourn.

BRAD JOHNS: Madam Chair, discussion on the motion. There was a motion . . .

GORDON HEBB: May I intervene?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

GORDON HEBB: There's no debate on a motion to adjourn.

THE CHAIR: There, you've ruled. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

The meeting is now adjourned. Thank you all for attending.

[The committee adjourned at 11:22 a.m.]