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Chair: Ms. Ruby Sahota



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• (1115)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Not only do we have quorum, but we have everyone here.

Welcome to meeting number nine of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Pursuant to the order of reference of Saturday, April 11, the committee is meeting to discuss parliamentary duties in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before we start, I want to inform members that pursuant to the order of reference, the committee is meeting for two reasons: one, for the purpose of receiving evidence concerning matters related to the conduct of parliamentary duties in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; and two, to prepare and present a report to the House containing recommendations on how members can fulfill their parliamentary duties while the House stands adjourned on account of public health concerns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The order of reference also stipulates that only motions needed to determine witnesses and motions related to the adoption of the draft report are in order.

Today's meeting is taking place exclusively by teleconference, and the audio feed of our proceedings is made available via the House of Commons website.

In order to facilitate the work of our interpreters and ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Before speaking, please wait until I have recognized you by name. When I recognize you by name, please unmute your telephone and begin to speak. There is no moderator on the call to unmute and mute the microphones; participants must do this themselves.

Members, should you want to request the floor, please unmute your microphone and signal this verbally to the chair. I am going to need a little bit of patience with this since I will not be able to see any hand signals. You are going to have to verbally indicate this to me, and I will do my best to keep the speaking order with the assistance of the clerk and try to call upon you in as orderly a fashion as possible.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly, and do not use your speaker-phone.

Should any technical challenges arise, in particular in relation to interpretation, please advise the chair, and the technical team will work to resolve the matter. Please note that we may need to suspend during these times, as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

With that being said, I believe we can begin this meeting. This meeting is going to begin informally, so we will not have our typical rounds from party to party. That will begin on Tuesday. Tuesday is when we hope to have the first set of witnesses called before us, and that will be a formal meeting with regard to the regular rounds of questions that we are used to.

Today's purpose, of course, is just to set out the framework of this study that we are about to undertake and to discuss different witnesses we would like to have called before this committee. We have about four or five meetings to try to complete this study before we have to start our work and submit the draft report to the analysts, so it's really important that we work efficiently, and hopefully we will be able to work collaboratively as well.

The clerk and I had a call and we also had a call with the vice-chairs of this committee yesterday to go over a few House rules. It was discussed in that meeting that it would be appropriate to call the Speaker and the Clerk of the House for the first meeting of witnesses, which will be this coming Tuesday. Other witnesses who could potentially be coming up would be other administrative witnesses, such as the law clerk or the IT administrative workers of the House. Of course, after those statements, I'm going to leave it up to you as to what you desire and whom you think it would be appropriate to call for the study.

I do remind you that our report is due back to the House on May 15. On May 15, we must have our final report adopted and submitted to the House.

That being said, I'd like to pass the floor over to the members so that we can engage in some collaborative work and try to get working as soon as possible on this study. Thank you.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): This is Rachel. I'd love to be on the speakers list.

The Chair: Okay, Rachel. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much.

I agree about having the Speaker and the Clerk. They should be there. I just want to add that in the letter from the Speaker to the House about having a digital form of Parliament, he mentioned the creation of a team that would be helping to analyze the ability of the House to do that. I'm just wondering if we could have representatives from that team come in to talk to us about the work that they've already done.

I also maybe need some guidance from the clerk on one of the things I have some concerns about, and that's security for our members. If we're using different types of technology, will that alert people to exactly where the MPs are? I'm assuming that people will be working from their homes, so it's about safety, not only for MPs but for all the folks who are participating.

In terms of rural and remote communities, I think it would be informative to have a couple of members of Parliament—there are a couple I can recommend from our party—to address Internet access for a virtual sitting. I'm thinking of someone like Mumilaaq, who is not at home right now, but these things could be changing very rapidly. I think another part we have to study is the flexibility. If we are asked to go into isolation again, how do we pick up from where we left off? I think it would be good to have that.

Then, of course, I would like to hear from the private sector representatives. I believe the House is using Zoom, but there are other systems. I think we should be looking at those at well and seeing what the options are.

That's all I have to add for the moment. I'm looking forward to hearing other people's thoughts.

Oh, and let me add just one other part. Should we be discussing longer meetings to accommodate the reality that we have to get this done so quickly?

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blaney. Definitely I've had some thoughts as well about the meeting length, so maybe we could discuss that.

Before we do that, I think I forgot a couple of things. I would like to remind everyone that the witness lists are also due tomorrow. That's Friday by noon, preferably. Hopefully, we can resolve a lot of the witnesses on the call today. Then you will have some time with your parties and your teams to finalize those before submitting them.

The second reminder is that this is a public meeting. Usually when we're discussing witnesses it can go into in camera mode, but this meeting set-up for now will be completely public. That is a reminder to all members that this is a public meeting. As it stands right now, all our meetings might be public meetings unless there is a way to accommodate us in the future. That is, all witness meetings and even the draft report at this time may be in a public setting.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Hi, Ruby. This is Ginette. Could you put me on the list?

The Chair: Absolutely, Ginette.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): This is Mark. Could you add me too, Ruby?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Madam Chair, could you add Blake Richards to the list as well?

The Chair: I will.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Add Kirsty Duncan, please.

The Chair: I will go to Ms. Petitpas Taylor for now, please.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Just very briefly, getting back to the possible witness list that we want to compile, we certainly recognize that COVID-19 is driving an unprecedented period of procedural experimentations across the world. I think it would be really interesting to be able to get perhaps a few individuals from other countries, perhaps someone from the U.K. Parliament or from other jurisdictions, just to see what they're doing to deal effectively with this really difficult period of time. If we could perhaps locate some individuals who would be able to appear, that would be great.

Finally, to Rachel Blaney's point with respect to extending our committee hours, I think a lot of important work needs to be done. I think we should really explore the possibility of perhaps expanding our committee hours to do this work.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next on the list I have Mr. Gerretsen and then Mr. Richards, and I believe I heard a voice that I could not identify. Who was that?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Chair, it was Kirsty Duncan.

The Chair: Okay. Ms. Duncan. Perfect.

Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead, please.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I was going to continue on with what Ms. Petitpas Taylor said regarding people from other jurisdictions who have had the opportunity to experiment with virtual parliaments or virtual forums like this. I think it's imperative upon us to look for best practices to figure out the best way to do this so that we don't have to figure it out along the way ourselves.

I know that typically we submit names. I don't have any off the top of my head. I'm hoping our analysts can put together some potential names of experts who can advise on this.

We should also give some consideration to the times at which our meetings are taking place. When we're all in Ottawa, it's easy to have our meetings from 11:00 to 1:00. I'm curious if that meeting time still works, given the time changes throughout the country, and how that will impact members as well as potential witnesses.

I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thanks, Madam Chair. I have a few things.

First is a question probably for you, I suspect. For Tuesday's meeting with the Clerk and the Speaker, will the Clerk be bringing some other officials from the House of Commons with him, or is it just the Clerk alone?

The Chair: Hold on a second and I'll try to get confirmation on that for you.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive): As of right now, my understanding is that it's the Speaker and the Clerk. Frequently, however, when those types of witnesses appear, other officials from the House administration accompany them, just maybe not so much as witnesses. As of right now, it would be those two individuals, the Clerk and the Speaker of the House.

Mr. Blake Richards: We may want to ask that other officials be brought with the Clerk. These are some of the folks we were thinking of: The law clerk might be advisable, and the assistants to the clerk for committees and legislative services, and for House proceedings, might both be valuable sources of information for us as well. It might be good to clarify who would be coming with them and make sure there isn't anyone left out who might be helpful to the committee. I will mention that.

Extending the number of meetings or the hours of meetings has been mentioned a couple of times. I'm certainly not opposed to that if it's necessary. Maybe it's putting the cart before the horse. We probably should establish the witnesses we want to see, how many there might be, and what areas they would be in. I guess then we could make decisions based on how much work we think we have ahead of us.

As far as the time of the meeting is concerned, being out west I guess there would be one time zone beyond mine. If it's 9 a.m. for us here, it would be 8 a.m. in British Columbia. I don't see a problem with the time we're sitting at, other than, I suppose, that we all miss the daily updates from the Prime Minister, but I'm sure we have people who can brief us on what was said.

As far as the witnesses themselves are concerned, we may want to try to group them into a number of categories, because I think there are some very obvious areas that we will want to explore when we're looking at ways the House could sit differently.

I think the first one would be looking at procedural, legal and constitutional questions around that. There would be some fairly obvious witnesses who could be brought forward beyond the current officials, such as experts from days gone by, I suppose, who would have a considerable amount of expertise but are not in the

game now. They would have opinions, I'm sure, about what could be possible. I'm thinking about former clerks, former speakers, people like that.

Another good grouping would be, obviously, around the very idea of feasibility. There are probably a number of experts to suggest there, who would be able to give us some thoughts about the feasibility of different things we might be considering. Another area we would want to explore would be security and whether there are any security questions around any of the possible ideas.

I think the idea that was raised a couple of times already about looking at other legislatures' experiences is a good one. I would suggest that we either seek senior officials from those jurisdictions, or if we are going to have representatives, elected officials.... The U.K. example was mentioned already. Obviously, there are some differences of opinion among their officials about what should happen there. I think government members want the idea of a virtual question period. I think there's some opposition to that from the opposition parties, or at least the main opposition party. If we're going to seek elected officials, we should probably make sure we have both perspectives represented.

There has been a lot of focus on the idea of virtual sittings. We should also have some people talk to us about other alternatives to virtual sittings. Obviously, we would look at the Public Health Agency and emergency preparedness experts. Things like that would be good there.

I have some suggestions we have put together in all these different areas, but I think those would be appropriate considerations we should be looking at. We should probably try to make sure we have witnesses to give us some thoughts and advice from all those different perspectives before we move forward with anything.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards. Those were very good suggestions.

I did mention at the beginning the law clerks and the legislative teams. Would you like them all in the first meeting, or would you like to see them spaced out?

Mr. Blake Richards: If we're going to use the first meeting as an opportunity to gauge where things are now and what might be possible, it would be good to have a number of the officials together. We may want to leave open the possibility of having them come back later on.

We may find that we have some questions now, but then we'll hear from others about modality, feasibility issues and security issues. We might want to come back with questions that we aren't thinking about now, but which may come up based on what we hear in testimony or in questioning witnesses. At that point, we may want to bring back the officials from the House of Commons to ask them those questions that have come up through the course of the study.

That would be my thinking. Bring them all in now, but then we may want to bring all of them, or some of them, back for additional questions later.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Chair, could I get on the speakers list, if that's allowed?

The Chair: Yes, Ms. May, I will put you on the speakers list. You are right behind Ms. Duncan, who will be next.

I just want to summarize some of what we've been hearing from different witnesses and private sector representatives. We've been speaking about other parliaments that are engaging in this type of work right now, especially in the U.K. We have also heard concerns about safety for members, and also security. Safety and security have been coming up, and also alternatives. Those are all things everyone should note.

On extending the meetings, I should also remind everyone that we have to work with our technical team. There are other committee meetings that are at work on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and there may be some resource difficulties, but we will look into that.

Ms. Duncan is next.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Chair, could you put me on the list as well, please?

The Chair: I will, Mr. Brassard.

Ms. Duncan, are you there?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, colleagues. It's so nice to hear everyone's voice.

Accountability and oversight are fundamental to our democracy. I like the idea of having the Speaker, the Clerk and the House administration.

This is ultimately a health crisis. It's a pandemic. It is important to hear about the latest information on health from our experts. I would be concerned about bringing together 338 colleagues from all parts of the country where there may or may not be COVID spread. It is important to remind people of the importance of asymptomatic spread. Bringing people together would be irresponsible. We've asked Canadians to stay at home in order to flatten the curve, and we are achieving this in the communities. Our first order of business must be to protect Canadians. It is important that we serve our communities, but that we also demonstrate that protection. It is important to hear from our health officials.

I would just reiterate that virtual parliaments are taking place, and it will be really important to hear those perspectives on how they are doing it, because accountability and oversight are so important.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Duncan.

Ms. May is next.

• (1135)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to colleagues for allowing me to weigh in as a non-member of the committee and take my virtual place at the virtual table.

I think there are three categories of inquiry for the committee.

The first, of course, is one of those things that are essential for parliamentary functioning. It is that we are, by our rules, required to do things in person, and to change the rules to allow us to do things remotely.

The second category of inquiry is with regard to the technology and whether we currently have the bandwidth to take it all on. I know that the existing resources of the teleconferencing functions of the Government of Canada are stretched. That's why the unanimous consent motion restricted us to only six committees that could be meeting in the fashion that we are now meeting in. However, there are many other committees that have urgent business, and it would be good to be able to find a way for those to meet as well.

The last set of inquiries is to look at what's going on internationally. The U.K. is in about the same boat we are in. I'd also flag that it seems that South America's parliaments and legislatures, such as those in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Ecuador, are doing far more. There are countries around the world, such as Poland, that have taken the steps to be able to allow remote voting. They have moved a little bit further and faster. I know the parliamentary analysts and the Library of Parliament people will be able to do better research than I've been able to do by googling at home, but it does seem that some countries around the world have addressed the real crunch, which is the ability to vote remotely.

In the reports from other countries, people are very specific as to the platforms they're using, whether it's Zoom or another virtual method of pulling people together in the same space. Those should be examined by tech experts. I also think we need to turn our eyes to security questions around the security implications of having a lot going on over specific private sector platforms.

I should have mentioned the European Parliament. They're allowing remote voting, but they are also meeting with social distance.

I just want to put on the record that even with the small number of people we had in Parliament on Saturday, the opposition lobby did not have adequate social distancing. I didn't go in because it wasn't possible to walk through it to the door to the chamber and practise social distancing at the same time, so if we're going to be moving to more sessions with 30 to 40 people, there will have to be physical changes made to the layout of the opposition lobby in order to keep social distance.

Personally, I agree with Dr. Duncan's comment that we should be paying attention to public health officials and not having a physical session just for the sake of having it. We should expand our technological limits and we should enter the 21st century. Maybe we can make some innovations that will last beyond the pandemic, such that people who are bedridden and in hospital are able to vote in Parliament without physically getting up from their deathbeds to go to vote. I've seen too much of that and I think it's time that....

The argument for taking it beyond the pandemic might actually be making it harder, but I think we should explore remote voting, teleconferencing and a virtual Parliament, and hear from witnesses of the countries that are actually doing it.

● (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. May.

Mr. Brassard is next.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm not going to expand too much on what Mr. Richards has already spoken about. I'm in agreement with a lot he had to say. I do want to pick up on a couple of things.

First and foremost is the security issue. I think we need to spend time not just with House security and some of our IT people, but with outside IT security experts as well, because, as more and more people become involved in this type of technology, if we decide on some form of virtual meetings, there are questions related to software on computers such as the private entity of Zoom, for example, the bombing and hacking of the Zoom site and the possibility of hijacking feeds. We've already talked about remote areas and whether they're most susceptible, given the fact that there's less rural broadband security there. Security needs to be a big part of what we do in terms of our focus on this study.

I'm also aware that the U.S. Senate has done a cybersecurity study as it relates to virtual meetings. We may want to consider someone from Homeland Security or some security team related to the U.S. Senate, perhaps the chair of the Senate committee, to highlight what they found in their study.

The second point I would want to make that differentiates from Mr. Richards' points this morning is that we need to expand this beyond just looking at virtual sittings within the chamber. We've seen over the last couple of weeks that committees have been structured virtually, whether through the telephone, as we're doing today, or online. I think we have to understand that this is more House procedure standpoint—not just understand, but also accept the fact that committees need to have the same power they would if we were all sitting together today in Parliament in one of those committee rooms. It relates to moving motions. My experience in watching some of these committees is that they become more like seminars, as opposed to performing the duly constituted legislative functions of committee. The ability to request information, documents or other information, from the government has to be a priority in what we look at as we move forward.

Again, my two main points, just to reaffirm them, are, first, the issue of security and the impact that has on our ability to perform virtually, and second, the ability of the committees to function as

they are purposed for, not just as an audience. That speaks more to the House, and there are a lot of other issues with respect to privilege and the ability on points of order. All of this stuff is something we can cover procedurally.

Last, I want to reaffirm what Mr. Richards said, that we're going to have the Speaker and the Clerk of the House come at the beginning and, as we move through the witnesses over the next couple of weeks, I think it's important to bring them back on the back end, to address any of the issues or questions that may come up as a result of procedure, security and all the other issues that we will discuss over the course of the next couple of weeks.

That's all I have to say. Thank you, Madam Chair. I would ask for some consideration of those points when it comes to witnesses.

The Chair: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

Everyone has raised really thoughtful points. I have had a chat with the clerk on the side as well, regarding the first meeting. We think that there will be very many questions for the Speaker of the House and the Clerk of the House. We will be trying to figure out where to fit in the law clerk. Maybe at that point we'll be able to decide how many questions we have for the law clerk. We were also discussing on the side that perhaps we can entertain having the law clerk on our calls more regularly. That's something we're exploring, and we'll get back to you on that.

We have many ideas that have come forward in terms of where everyone's mind space is at. This reminds me a little of the witness from the U.K. we recently had at our informal meeting, when she stated that sometimes it's not until it's absolutely necessary that Parliament and parliamentarians feel there's a need for some changes to take place. At this point, necessity is the mother of all invention at this time. I think we'll be able to come up with some interesting things. I look forward to that.

I will just remind everybody that it's 11:45. Perhaps we can get some more discussion as to specific witnesses and maybe some of that grouping that was mentioned by Mr. Richards and others.

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Chair, I would like to speak.

[*English*]

The Chair: Please go ahead, Mr. Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Personally, I agree that people from Parliament should come with the clerk. I don't have any issue with this. I agree that we need to hear from technology experts. Technology is crucial if we want to work effectively, understand each other and hear each other properly. That's also clear. I also agree that we should hear the experiences of witnesses from other places. I don't see any issue with this. Obviously, I imagine that we'll talk to them by video conference or by teleconference, given the situation. I don't think that these people will go from one side to the other to come talk to us.

However, I have a suggestion. I think that you were trying to draw up lists of specific people. I think that constitutional issues are extremely important. We must ensure that the legislative structure of Parliament will be respected in this process.

I suggest that we invite Benoît Pelletier, a former minister who is a constitutional expert and a professor at the University of Ottawa. I think that it might be worthwhile to hear him speak about the potential for the virtual Parliament to comply with the basic rules of the Constitution.

I'm therefore submitting the name Benoît Pelletier. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: What was that name again?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Benoît Pelletier.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: He's a former Liberal minister in the Quebec National Assembly.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Richards, go ahead.

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a question for Mr. Therrien.

For Benoît Pelletier, I don't need a lot of context, but just some sense as to who he is or what his expertise is. I'm not familiar with the name.

The Chair: Mr. Therrien, could you answer that question, please?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Yes.

He's an experienced constitutional expert and a professor at the University of Ottawa. In Quebec, he's truly a leading authority on constitutional issues. He used to be a Liberal minister in Quebec City. I believe that he was the minister of intergovernmental affairs. He knows the ins and outs of the Canadian Constitution extremely well. I think that it would be worthwhile to hear from him so that he can enlighten us. It would be a win-win situation for everyone.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: It sounds like he could potentially be a good witness.

Since we're on the area of constitutional issues, I'd suggest we group the constitutional and procedural areas together. I could suggest, in that area, some other potential witnesses that we've put together as a group.

We have two former clerks who have been able to provide our committee with some good advice in the past, both during their time as clerks and since then. They are Audrey O'Brien and Marc Bosc.

Other suggestions we would have as well are a couple of former law clerks and parliamentary counsels. One is Rob Walsh, who has been at our committee a number of times in the past, and Joseph Maingot is the other.

Another former clerk, and also previously the privacy commissioner, is Robert Marleau. We could also look at the former clerk of the Senate, Gordon Barnhart.

Another suggestion is someone who has been very helpful to the committee numerous times in the past, the former speaker of the House, Peter Milliken.

Those would be some other suggestions that I'd have in that particular area.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you for those suggestions. I like the way you're doing the grouping. I think these are just suggestions, because the list is getting long.

We have to remember we will have four or five meetings, potentially. If we're not able to extend the length of time of our meetings, then it really limits us in time.

We have experts in IT, which I would imagine could be one meeting. I don't know if it would go into another meeting to deal with the security and safety aspect or if they could be coupled together.

Then we have another meeting with reference to other parliaments that are going through this experience right now.

Then we have a meeting with constitutional, legal and procedural people. That would probably be more than one meeting.

Are there any other groupings that you see at this time?

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, you mentioned one grouping of safety and security. That certainly makes sense to me. We've already identified this one on constitutional, legal and procedural matters. You mentioned technology. I would broaden that and call it feasibility, and technology would be a part of it. There may be other issues surrounding the feasibility that we want to explore. You mentioned other legislatures. That seems to be one we've all agreed with.

There is another one I suggest we look at. The focus has mainly been on this discussion about virtual or not virtual. Maybe we could explore if there are alternatives to look at other than virtual, or just nothing, essentially. Mr. Brassard already mentioned the idea of exploring further how committees and their functioning could work as part of this, so maybe we need a meeting on that. That would take us to about five meetings, which is about what we were looking at, right? I suggest that we try to do that.

Certainly I've suggested a number of witnesses that might be too many for, say, that one grouping, but we may find that some are not available. We can always revisit the idea of extending the number of meetings if we need to. We could have a good list of potential witnesses and then pare it down as needed or as things happen based on the availability of witnesses.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Could I get on the speakers list?

The Chair: Yes, absolutely, Mr. Turnbull. I'll put you on next.

I see that panning out. I do think feasibility will be woven into almost every meeting. Every witness will probably have comments as to feasibility, be they the IT experts, the technology experts or the security and safety experts, and even the other legislatures and parliaments. Feasibility will be a question you'll be able to ask any witness. We don't necessarily need a meeting alone for that, but I can see how we could probably set aside separate time to explore just the alternatives.

Thank you for that, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Turnbull—

Mr. Blake Richards: Sorry, Madam Chair, but could I ask a question in relation to what you've just spoken about?

The Chair: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Blake Richards: This is just to clarify what I was getting at with the idea of feasibility.

Technology was specifically mentioned, and it is part of that grouping. I suppose you could say it's technology to some degree, but what about things like translation? Maybe we could have someone from the Translation Bureau give us some sense of the challenges they might face. That would be one example. Maybe someone from the media could give us a sense as to the challenges there would be for them to be able to report on the proceedings of Parliament.

It's things like that. I don't know if those fit within technology. That's why I suggested expanding it just a bit and calling it feasibility. We could call it whatever you want. I agree that everything is tied into feasibility, but technology would be one part of the focus. Those are a couple of areas I thought of. We could call it technology and just have the understanding that it may include things like that as well.

• (1155)

The Chair: Absolutely.

Okay, I will move on. We were on the same topic. That's why we were having a bit of a back-and-forth, in case anybody is wondering.

Next on the speakers list is Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, thank you very much.

I really appreciate this discussion. I think it's really worthwhile. In particular, I appreciated Mr. Gerretsen's comment about international best practices, and I know that has been picked up on.

In terms of having themed meetings and understanding how many meetings we will have—it sounded like there would be four or five—I have a clarification question and then I'd like to make some follow-up comments. Is that really determined? Is the final meeting necessary for making recommendations, so all of us can talk about what we've learned from the study and make final recommendations? Would we reserve the fifth meeting for that purpose? That's just a question for clarification. Do you have any thoughts on that? Then maybe I could make a couple of other comments.

The Chair: Maybe we could hear some thoughts from Andre Barnes on this one to help us out. Perhaps the clerk or the analyst could help us out with that.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I'll just jump in quickly before Andre talks.

I can provide a bit of information to Mr. Turnbull, but it also may be of interest to the other members of the committee: The deadline to report back to the House that was stipulated in the House motion from last Saturday is May 15.

If we work back from that, taking into account the production time needed for the report, which includes various aspects such as translation and formatting and then of course the drafting that the analyst needs to do, we are looking at about four meetings at which the committee could entertain witnesses, or possibly pushing that to five. All of that would suggest the committee would probably need to be starting to consider a draft report sometime during the first week of May so that the committee could properly assess it and make any additional changes that members would want to make to it, including possible recommendations they might want to put forward.

Once that part was done, it could then go back to be re-edited, changed, altered with all of the translation that is needed with respect to that, and then undergo the production process that's needed so that a final, fully adopted report could be deposited with the Clerk of the House by the deadline of May 15.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, may I ask our clerk a question?

The Chair: Yes, absolutely, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Sorry, Mr. Richards.

I'm just wondering if I can finish my comments before Mr. Richards asks his clarification question.

The Chair: Yes, I'm very sorry about that, Mr. Turnbull. I forgot that you were the one who was intervening at this time.

Mr. Richards, could you save your intervention for a little bit later and we'll carry on with—

Mr. Blake Richards: Sorry, Madam Chair, but it's a very brief question just to clarify something he said. I'm not looking to jump the line here; it's just a clarification of what was—

The Chair: We're in the middle of an intervention. This was a question asked of the clerk, so there is still a back-and-forth going on. Right after that we will go back to you, Mr. Richards. Could you just hold that thought for a couple of minutes? Thank you.

Go ahead, Ryan.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just to finish my thought here, I really appreciated what Mr. Richards was saying about feasibility.

After we have had the numerous meetings and we have heard from witnesses, heard all of the testimony and gathered all of the evidence that we can, just understanding the structure, I wonder whether we could consider feasibility as part of the lens that we look through to make recommendations, as part of the analysis. As you said, Madam Chair, feasibility will be something that comes up and on which we will be gathering intel all the way through.

That would be my preference. I think feasibility is really important and I think there are trade-offs with any technological solution that we'll consider.

I want to make a couple of other points. I would opt to begin the process with those international best practices. I think we're going to get the most value out of this study if we really start at that place. That starting point is going to elucidate all kinds of opportunities for further inquiry.

The other thing I would mention is that I strongly agree with the general structure that has been emerging here. I see it as international best practices. There obviously has to be some consideration of the various technological solutions out there and a bit of an analysis of those. I think all of my colleagues here today have made some very good points on procedural changes and the parliamentary role in any function-related implications of doing this or of considering a virtual parliament.

Security and confidentiality also come up a lot, and rightly so. We all have concerns there.

I also wonder, if we were pressed for time, whether that could be condensed into the feasibility analysis that we do as a group. I do think it's an important issue, so it may merit a meeting on its own that might also become part of the later phase of the work as we analyze the different solutions and their implications.

● (1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Can I be put back on the list?

The Chair: I will be putting you back on the list.

Dr. Duncan, I was just going to say that after we hear Mr. Richards' question, I actually have a question out of my notes from

something that you, Ms. Blaney and Ms. May have said, so I'll interject with that question right after we hear from Mr. Richards and his question for the clerk.

Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: In the interim I've had the opportunity to expand a little bit on my thoughts on this. I guess I'm going to throw out a bit of a suggestion and then ask the clerk a question.

From my understanding of his timeline, we would want to have at least the beginnings of a report by the first week of May. That was how I understood it. If I understood that correctly, what I might suggest, given the time we would then have.... Obviously our meeting next week, which would be the 21st, I guess, would be the first meeting with witnesses, with the Clerk and the Speaker and other officials potentially. That would leave us with potentially four meetings if we were to follow our regular schedule. It sounds like we may want to cover slightly more than what those four meetings might allow.

What we might want to do is to look at maybe extending the meetings by an hour on the 23rd, 28th and 30th of April, and the 5th of May. We could have three-hour meetings and have two panels of one and a half hours each on those days, which would essentially give us four meetings times two. That's eight panels, which would give us enough time to cover some of those things with a couple of panels, and others where we don't have as many witnesses with just one, and then still allow us to bring back the officials one more time if we needed to ask any questions there. Then we could use May 7 to consider the first draft of our report.

The Chair: Thank you for those helpful suggestions, Mr. Richards. The clerk and I will explore that with the technical team to see if we can manage it.

My question is related to some of the notes I have from the comments made by Ms. May, Dr. Duncan and Ms. Blaney. There were some references to health and having witnesses around that, and then also the private sector was something you stated, Ms. Blaney.

I'm going to go to you, Dr. Duncan, and see if you can help me tease that out a little bit, or if you have other comments. Then if Ms. May or Ms. Blaney would like, they could interject.

● (1205)

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Yes, I think this is fundamentally important. It is a pandemic. It's a public health crisis. I can't be clearer that the most important officials are our public health officials. Some provinces are showing signs that Canada's battle against COVID-19 may be taking a turn for the better, but we're not there yet.

Canada's chief public health officer said this Wednesday in a press conference that there's reason to be cautiously optimistic that the spread of COVID is slowing with cases in the country. Doubling rates are about every 10 days now, compared with three days in late March. However, the public health officer has warned that it's too soon to leave physical distancing measures and doing so would "be like making our way down from a mountain in the darkness". I think it's very important that we hear from the chief public health officer for Canada, as well as other officials. I think they have to be among the first people we hear from, because we have to respect the public health, we have to respect the timing and we have to stick to the evidence.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Duncan. We always respect your thoughts in these matters because you have a wealth of experience in this field.

Ms. May or Ms. Blaney, your comments were around this too. I apologize; you said them at the beginning of the meeting and you might want to tease them out a bit.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

First of all, I just want to say that I think we need to be looking at all the options. I talked about the private sector, and we should be looking at all the options. For example, I think right now the House is using Zoom. There is GoToMeeting. There is Skype with Microsoft. I think it's really important for us to be looking at all the systems. When we talk about issues of security, I would like to hear from those sectors as to whether they can meet some of our needs more effectively.

I also want to say that it is really important to see the challenges. I represent a more rural riding. Some parts of my riding have good connectivity, while other parts do not. I think it's very important that as we look at this system, we also recognize that there are challenges. I don't want us to lose connection with our members who live in more rural or remote areas, or what that impact could be on them.

I agree that we need to look at what other countries are doing. I think that is wise, but I also think, from what I have seen in research, that a lot of them are in a place very similar place to ours. They are figuring it out. I just don't want us to have hope that they're going to have a great solution for us. Looking at what our internal capacity is, the unusual reality of Canada being a very large country with not a very huge population and a lot of varying infrastructure, we need to address this issue, especially if we're looking at ways to potentially bring 338 people together digitally, along with all of the staff.

I also want to support what Mr. Richards said the other day. I think it's important to look at how the interpreter services and the

other services are adjusting and how it feels for some of the staff who are in rooms together now.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blaney. I appreciate that feedback.

Ms. May, would you like to say anything else? Would you like another opportunity? Also, Mr. Therrien, we haven't heard from you for a while. I know your comments were mainly around constitutional experts.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: We may work on some suggestions between now and noon tomorrow, the deadline. However, for now, that's fine by me. I don't see any issue.

• (1210)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Ruby, it's Mark here. Can I get on the list?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: My question is about the next move from here. I realize that the suggestions have to be submitted by tomorrow. Will the analysts or the clerk then be providing us with a list of who has been invited?

Personally, I've been hoping that the analysts can provide us with some suggestions for witnesses that we can then pull from. When we get to that point, can you just talk about what the next step is from here?

The Chair: Justin, I think you have some information as to when we could have a brief ready. That might help guide us a little bit as well.

The Clerk: That's right. Andre can jump in as well, but I understand that a briefing note will be ready to be distributed on Monday. I'm not sure if there are witnesses suggested in it. When I'm done, I'll let Andre speak to that.

On the broader issue of witnesses, we have asked that members submit a prioritized list of their preferred witnesses by tomorrow at 12 noon. The plan we will be working with at that point, once we get those lists from any of the members who want to provide them or any of the parties that are providing them, is we will build a consolidated list of the witnesses by party. Then we will have a final list to bring forward to the committee at our next meeting, which is next Tuesday.

In the interim, however, in order to not waste any time in trying to secure witnesses, once we get the prioritized list from each of the parties tomorrow, we will begin to work through the top preferences of the different parties to build any possible witness panels. Some of the information the committee has provided today in terms of how it would like to see those panels operate will be very useful to us as we try to populate those panels with different witnesses.

Generally, at this point, based on what I've heard from the committee—and correct me if I'm wrong—we'd be looking at trying to make a panel that would essentially include what may be going on elsewhere in parliaments in the provinces and territories in Canada and also maybe internationally.

We would also look at trying to have a panel that would have legal, constitutional and procedural experts who could talk to the committee on those different types of issues. There could be a panel as well that could look at some of the issues related to the IT challenges, security and feasibility, which may also include rural and remote issues with broadband in terms of access for members who are connecting from rural and remote areas of Canada.

I can also share with the committee that in some of the discussions I've had with the House administration, they have let me know that it's entirely possible that on Tuesday—and this will be something the Speaker and the Clerk can answer questions about as well—what might be most useful to them as they go about their work trying to potentially stand up a virtual House or virtual sittings of the House, and hybrid sittings of the House in some combination, is if this committee, in its final report, were able to provide some guiding principles to the work the House administration would undertake in that regard. It might suggest sort of higher-level recommendations that would still, nonetheless, give the House administration some flexibility in determining the technical side of things. At the same time, it would help guide the work that they may ultimately be called upon to do as they try to put in place some sort of virtual sitting or hybrid virtual sittings in the next four weeks.

The Chair: Okay. I believe that for one of those panels, somewhere at the front end, it was requested that we have some health officials as well.

The Clerk: That's right. I'm sorry. There will be health officials as well.

The Chair: Okay. We all have our work cut out for us, especially at the beginning trying to organize some of this.

Mr. Gerretsen, do you have other questions? Does that help a bit?

I know it doesn't answer your question completely at this time. I think you want the information sooner than we're being able to provide it to you, but we're all in a very [*Inaudible—Editor*] situation.

• (1215)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No, that's great. That's appreciated. I just wanted to understand the process, and I understand it much better now. Thank you.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, I'd like to get on the speakers list one last time, if I may.

The Chair: Okay. Yes, I will—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Can I get on the list after Ms. May?

The Chair: Yes, absolutely.

Are those the only voices I heard, Ms. May and Mr. Turnbull? Okay.

Go ahead, Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I want to support the suggestions that we get advice from Audrey O'Brien, Marc Bosc and Joseph Maingot. Those are very good suggestions.

Again, the question around security of platforms is a key one. I've already mentioned that, but I think we might want to explore going the route of the finance committee. I don't know if it's already being considered that the finance and health committees are able to conduct their meetings with Zoom so that it's more virtual and we can actually see each other and see the witnesses.

If that is worth considering, if it's technologically possible for this committee, it seems that of all the committees that are exploring the idea of virtual sittings, we might want to take this beyond teleconferences.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. May, as of Tuesday's meeting we will have the video as well as the audio. It was just for this meeting that we were not able to arrange it. Moving forward, we will have the video. Thank you for your comments.

Mr. Turnbull is next.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I have just a quick comment that I think is in the same vein as Mr. Gerretsen's. It's a question for the clerk or perhaps the analysts.

Do we know whether that briefing will include a list of different technological solutions that we should be considering? I just wondered whether there's an ability to produce that list if it's not going to be included in the briefing. I think it would be helpful for all of us. I have used quite a number of collaborative tools—technological solutions—for all kinds of purposes. I'm not familiar with all of them, of course. I think many of us are used to using some but are not familiar with all. It would be great to have a more comprehensive list of those if possible.

The Chair: Our clerk will help us out with some further guidance. Hopefully, Andre can jump in as well on what will be in the briefing.

The Clerk: To answer Ms. May's question, as of Tuesday the PROC virtual meetings will be on the Zoom platform. We won't be in the teleconference format that we are in right now. It will be on the Zoom platform, as will our subsequent meetings as well. There were some timing issues in getting a Zoom meeting up and going as quickly as we would have needed it for today, so the decision was made to have a teleconference.

I have one last thing, Madam Chair, before you get Andre to comment. I was hoping to get some direction from the committee with respect to witnesses for next Thursday's meeting. We have the Speaker and the Clerk for next Tuesday. It would be tremendously helpful to be able to get going on trying to secure witnesses for next Thursday. I'm wondering if the committee might be in a position even now, at this meeting, to provide me with instructions on the witnesses we should be considering for next Thursday.

The Chair: Okay—

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Chair, it's Kirsty Duncan—

Mr. Blake Richards: This is Blake Richards. Can I get on the list?

The Chair: I have Dr. Duncan and Mr. Richards on the speakers list. If anyone else wants to get on the list for that issue, can you identify yourself?

Can we hear from Andre, please, on what you will be providing in the briefing so that it can guide us? Then we will carry on with the question that the clerk just posed with regard to Thursday's meeting.

• (1220)

Mr. Andre Barnes (Committee Researcher): Madam Chair, due to the tight timelines in producing the briefing notes, I tried to anticipate what the committee would like to hear about. The first briefing note will discuss the order of reference. It will discuss some broad considerations about procedures and practices that would be touched on by what this study would involve, but it's such a broad study that really all procedures and practices would be affected by what we're studying. It will also cover what the provinces and territories have done, with some suggested questions for the witnesses.

I'll try to roll out the briefing notes as fast as I can, but due to translation, that's probably... Now that I've heard the suggestion from Mr. Turnbull, I will try to add that for Tuesday. I might not have time to do so, but I will certainly get that going for next Thursday's briefing note and for future briefing notes.

Please keep the suggestions coming, and I will add them to the next briefing notes.

The Chair: Thank you, Andre. You always do an amazing job. I know you won't disappoint.

Next, the clerk was asking whether we can have some idea of what to expect for Thursday's meeting. From all the conversation that's happened, it seems that we have the Speaker and the Clerk, and then we have an expectation of having at least health experts or legal and procedural and constitutional people after that. I think it's a discussion about choosing between those two categories right now.

On the list I have Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really appreciate the thoughtful comments today. I have to really push that it has to be health up front, and as up front as we can make it. Even though the curve is flattening out, Canada is still reporting more than 1,000 new COVID-19 cases per day, cases that will likely need to be treated in hospitals and ICUs and will strain the health care system. There's still a steady stream, and it's really important to not get complacent and to ensure that our physical distancing measures and public health measures that are put in place are maintained. What we really want to see is a reduction in the number of new cases per day, and we've got to hear from our health officials again. This comes back to public health, science and evidence.

The Chair: Mr. Richards is next, and then it will be Mr. Brassard.

Would anyone else like to get on the speakers list?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I would like to be on the speakers list.

The Chair: After Mr. Brassard, it will be Ms. Blaney.

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My thought was that after the officials, maybe we would be exploring primarily procedural issues and things like that. It might be wise to hear from other experts in that same area. That said, if we're willing to go with my suggestion to expand the meetings by an hour so as to have two one-and-a-half-hour panels, it might be possible to do both on that day. Barring the decision to do that, I would suggest we would want to look at those types of officials on the Thursday meeting, just to keep us on the track that we would already be on.

The Chair: Mr. Brassard is next.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to address the point that Ms. Duncan brought up with respect to health.

I think all of us clearly understand that we're in the middle of a public health crisis at this point. Our mandate from Parliament is to look at virtual sittings and the impact that will have. If we require information, there's plenty of information out there with respect to public health official advice.

The health committee has been dealing with this for the better part of two weeks. Given the tight timelines that we're in, with all due respect to Ms. Duncan's point, I think we need to focus on our mandate and leave the public health aspect to the health committee. If there are any references that are to be made, if there is any information to be gathered, we can certainly have the analysts check in with the public health analyst to seek that advice if we have any questions.

There is plenty of information out there with respect to public health, and I think we should stick to our focus, which is specifically to deal with the issues on virtual sittings, and there are many of them, as clearly evidenced by the conversation today. We are going to run out of time. I would not want to take any time away from those issues that are going to be important to this committee as we write a report to Parliament with respect to virtual sittings.

I'm not diminishing the public health aspect of this right now, but there's plenty of conversation going on at the health committee. We could use them as reference if we need to, but we need the time to deal with these issues directly.

Clearly, Madam Chair, based on some of the conversation that we're having and the potential of witness lists and the scope of what we need to look at, we'll not have enough time to even deal with the virtual sittings, let alone any public health information that's required from us to make a decision when that information is already out there.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

Ms. Blaney is next.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much, Chair.

I just want to express my deep appreciation for Dr. Duncan's comments. I have to say that the context of everything we are talking about right now is within that health frame. I also agree that the health committee is doing a lot of that work and I think it would be important for us to check in on a regular basis in committee, reminding ourselves about our commitment to doing this because of COVID-19, because of what we're dealing with across Canada, but not to lose too much time. I think that is going to be the struggle.

Personally, I would like to hear, hopefully sooner than Tuesday, if there is a possibility for us to expand these meetings. I think just having an understanding of the capacity within the House would really help us, as a committee, to make that kind of decision. What I would like on Thursday as well is to get to the constitutional and legal experts as quickly as possible. I think that will really frame our moving forward in a really strong way.

That is my recommendation.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

We are exploring the extension right now, and maybe by the end of the meeting we will have some information, or quite soon afterward. We are definitely looking into that, and I take your points.

Does anyone else want to comment further about Thursday's meeting and get on the speakers list? We're trying to figure out whether we can extend it and maybe put in both. I think the point that we can accommodate both of these perspectives was brought up by Mr. Richards as well. Would anyone else like to speak to that?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, it's Mr. Turnbull here. Can I get on the speakers list?

The Chair: Yes, absolutely. Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I appreciate all the comments that were made, especially those by Ms. Duncan.

I think it's really important to ground this study in the realities that we're in. This context is, I believe, unique in many aspects. Parliament has never had to function within a global pandemic before, as far as I know. I quote from one particular report that has been done on a virtual parliament in the U.K., which said we're confronting "a highly infectious and potentially deadly coronavirus, with a long incubation period during which many people are asymptomatic".

I think we need to understand and be grounded in this study in terms of why we're doing it. We're doing this study because meeting physically in Parliament actually poses undue health risks for many people who work there, including MPs but also including the many support staff who are needed on site for those physical meetings. I think we're studying this because we have a responsibility to not put any of our colleagues at risk, and I think this is really important.

Although I really appreciate Mr. Brassard's comments that the health committee is doing exceptional work, I really do feel that we need to ground this in a few health experts up front just to keep us grounded. I think we really need to keep our feet on the ground.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Monsieur Therrien, do you have any feedback as to how you see health experts and procedural or legal experts being at Thursday's meeting?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: No. This is in line with my earlier suggestion regarding the constitutional aspect. I'm completely fine with it. I don't see any issue in this area.

Clearly we must address the issue of public health and be aware of what the future may hold. I completely agree with this.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I've just received word internally from House management that our technical resources could probably accommodate the committee meeting for three hours at a time instead of two hours, meaning Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m., which would then potentially create an opportunity to split a three-hour meeting into two 90-minute meetings so that two different panels could come for each of those 90-minute sections.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. Thanks for working so quickly on that, Justin. I think this will help resolve the desire of the committee members to fully explore this issue and be able to give good recommendations to the House, so I appreciate that.

The reason I—

The Clerk: There is one last thing. Could I confirm, then, that on next Thursday we can go forward with the three-hour meeting? We'd split it into two panels.

Please correct me if I'm wrong, but am I understanding correctly that one panel would be related to public health issues and the other panel would be legal, constitutional and procedural experts?

The Chair: Correct, and I think we have had some discussion about having the law clerk also, perhaps in other meetings as well. Just as we have your expertise available to the committee, perhaps there might be some meetings where it would be valuable to have the law clerk on the line as well so that if questions popped up, he'd be able to supplement.

We'll keep that on the side, but that is how I see it right now. We can open it up to other members.

The reason I've been reaching out to some of the members for feedback is that I cannot see your facial expressions right now. I don't know if people are nodding in agreement or if people are in complete disagreement with some things, so I'm going to continue to call upon the different parties to try to get a sense of where we're at. I understand that maybe not all members are in line with their party at all times, but I think that's the best we can do for this teleconference today.

Does that sound good to the Liberal members?

Would anyone like to speak as to having that three-hour meeting for Thursday, with one of the two parts to the meeting being on health and the other on procedural and legal aspects? Would that be okay?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I will say yes on behalf of the Liberals, Ruby.

The Chair: Thank you, Ginette.

Would the Conservatives be agreeable to that?

Mr. Blake Richards: Maybe what we would want to do is expand on the health part. We talked about it being health and security. Those two things do go together to some degree, I think, so maybe we would want to have some balance of the health and security aspects on that panel. Otherwise I could agree with that idea.

• (1235)

The Chair: Okay, that's an interesting point. I'll try to explore with the analyst and the clerk as to how health and security or safety can go into that. I also see that we'd be talking about the IT and technology perspective as well, but I think it can fit into both.

Could I have feedback from the NDP and the Bloc about whether you'll be okay with a three-hour meeting on Thursday, with those two different parts to the meeting?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm fine with it.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Therrien, would you comment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I'm fine with it, very fine indeed.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Blaney, as well. That is how we'll try to proceed.

Mr. Richards, your point is taken, and we'll try to see how we can have as much information as possible woven into every meeting.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, I know I have no status on the committee, but another committee does begin its work on Thursdays at 1 p.m. eastern time, so if the three-hour PROC meeting could end before 1 p.m., that would certainly be much appreciated.

Obviously I have no status to even ask, but I thought I'd flag it in case other members are in my position.

The Chair: Thank you for flagging it. I was made aware of that. I tried to ask the clerk and the technical team whether 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. would work, and it seems they've come back with the 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. time frame working better for the technical team.

Justin, would you like to say anything on that?

The Clerk: Yes, the timeline I've been given is 11 a.m. until 1 p.m.. Now, I can go back to see if there is any flexibility or more flexibility on that so that it could be turned into 10 a.m. until 1 p.m..

The Chair: You mean that the timeline you were given was 11 a.m. until 2 p.m.—

The Clerk: Sorry, yes, that's right. It was 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. My apologies.

I can go back and check on 10 a.m. until 1 p.m., though, as well, but as of right now my understanding is that it could be possible for PROC to meet for three hours from 11:00 until 2:00.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Then there would be a one-hour overlap, but if it's possible to do it from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., that would be so good.

Thank you.

The Clerk: I can check, yes.

The Chair: Okay. The other voice I heard after Ms. May was Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I wouldn't be completely opposed to the idea of the 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. spot, but we are typically 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. I thought it would be easiest to expand an hour by going to 2 p.m. We already have that confirmation.

I would point out that all parties do have other members. It's not as if we can't cover off other committees, and we aren't all required to be on every committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Could I get on the speaking list?

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. May definitely works very hard, and oftentimes she is on many committees at once, so I understand her perspective, but I completely understand, Mr. Richards, from your location, why the 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. time frame would be preferable for the members.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I prefer the 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. format as well. I know that Ms. May and I are both in British Columbia, but I'm usually doing something else at seven o'clock in the morning that I have made a commitment to, and it would be better for me to be able to start at 8 a.m.

The Chair: Then you would like the time slot to be 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. You would like the time slot that we have now to be extended by one hour.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Yes, please.

The Chair: Okay—

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I am getting a bit more feedback as well. From a technical resource point of view in the House, it does seem that 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. is more feasible.

I may have spoken a bit too quickly. Just to correct what Mr. Richards was saying, I'm not in a position at this moment to confirm even 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., but if it can be done for three hours, it looks like that would be the time slot we would need to go with, and not the 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. format

The Chair: Unfortunately, Ms. May, it seems like everything is aligning for 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. It seems that this is the time slot that works best right now for the permanent members of the standing committee, so we're going to—

• (1240)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Yes, I absolutely understand.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the other members of the committee for tolerating my attempt to do two things at once. As you mentioned, I'll be able to have another member of my caucus cover other meetings.

The Chair: We know that if anyone can be two places at one time, it's you, Ms. May, so thank you for that.

Are there any other comments? Otherwise, the meeting could be coming to a close if everyone is agreeable that we have somewhat of a working order. We would like to have more specifics from you by 12 o'clock tomorrow as to the initial witnesses that you would like to see.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, may I intervene one last time?

If those prioritized witness lists can be sent to me by 12 noon tomorrow, ideally with contact information accompanying them, that will allow us to move fairly quickly to try to locate the witnesses, invite them and confirm their appearances for the upcoming meetings.

The Chair: All right. I believe everyone has been able to make note of that, so we'll be looking for the witness lists tomorrow by noon.

I think everyone has been able to get their feedback and comments in, and we have a good understanding of where all the members stand and what their interests are. We're going to try to do our best, in the next four to five meetings, to accommodate all these requests with some of the best witnesses that we can possibly have.

I look forward to working with all of you. It's been a pleasure to be on today's teleconference with all of you. We definitely miss seeing everybody. I know everyone is going through a very challenging time and trying to be the advocates in their communities at this time and also provide emergency responses to their constituents. Everyone is working extremely hard, and I appreciate your working even harder by allowing this committee to function as well as it has today and hopefully in the coming meetings as well, so that we can get this report back to the House by May 15.

In the end, I'd just like to say stay safe, and I hope all of your loved ones and families are doing well.

Thank you so much for being on today.

The meeting is adjourned.

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