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Chair: Mr. Sven Spengemann



Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1540)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira): If everybody's ready, I'll get started.

[Translation]

Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, cannot entertain points of order nor participate in debate.

[English]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party.

I am ready to receive motions for the position of chair.

Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): I'd like to nominate Mr. Sven Spengemann.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Ms. Sahota that Mr. Spengemann be elected as chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

I declare the motion carried, and Mr. Spengemann duly elected chair of the committee.

I invite Mr. Spengemann to take the virtual chair.

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): Thank you, Madam Clerk.

First of all, dear colleagues on the committee, thank you very much for the trust you have placed in me. I'm very honoured to have this opportunity to offer my services as chair of the committee. I look forward to the work we will do together. Welcome to all of you.

To finish setting up the committee, if you agree, we'll now proceed with the election of the vice-chairs.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Chair, congratulations on your position.

I would like to nominate Mr. Michael Chong for the position of vice-chair.

The Chair: Are there any other nominations for the position of vice-chair?

(Motion agreed to)

I declare Mr. Chong elected as vice-chair of the committee. Congratulations, Mr. Chong.

May we have a motion for the second vice-chair of the committee?

Mr. Chong, go ahead.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Chair, if Mr. Harris is willing, I nominate Mr. Harris for second vice-chair of this committee.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the nomination, but I understand that there's a bit of a convention with respect to these things.

We made great efforts during this Parliament, before prorogation, to ensure that the four parties were represented on all the committees—including the Canada-China committee, which is the case. That hasn't been accepted, but there's nothing to stop us, as a committee, from electing three vice-chairs. Normally, it would be Mr. Bergeron, and I don't want to take a position that would otherwise go to Mr. Bergeron, given the convention that's been operating in the House.

I would be very happy if we held with the tradition of the Canada-China committee and had a vice-chair from each party. It works well, and in fact it's important, as we've seen in other committees. Members who are vice-chairs make a contribution. We've seen it in the public safety committee, for example, and our members have been playing leading roles in committees, both in terms of helping set the agenda and in working collaboratively with the other parties in this minority Parliament.

With great respect and appreciation, I thank you for the nomination, but I would ask Mr. Bergeron what he would have to say about that. I don't think I will take the place of Mr. Bergeron in this discussion, but I will give him the opportunity to have a word.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, thank you very much.

I see that Ms. Sahota has raised her hand. I will let her comment quickly, and then we will turn it over to Mr. Bergeron.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I was also going to nominate Mr. Bergeron as the second vice-chair, so I guess that's the issue we have before us now.

Hon. Michael Chong: I withdraw the nomination.

[*Translation*]

Excuse me, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

I take Mr. Harris' intervention.

[*Translation*]

I nominate Mr. Bergeron as second vice-chair of the committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Yes, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, in view of the nomination of Mr. Bergeron, unless we were voting for two more vice-chairs, I would withdraw my nomination.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Genuis, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes. On a point of order, I'm being told that the staff who are on the phone line for the committee are having some quality problems in terms of being able to hear what's going on, especially on the English feed. They are having a hard time hearing.

I don't know if there's a way that can be resolved, but we want to make sure they can hear.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis. It's an important discussion.

Let's turn it over to the clerk and indirectly to the IT staff to see if that can be resolved in the next minute or so.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We are aware and we are working on it. As soon as it is fixed, I will let you know.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Jack Harris: Chair, I know that we will have to wait to see whether people can actually hear the meeting, which is important, but before we move any further, I wonder if perhaps we can see whether there is a consensus amongst the committee to have three vice-chairs. Perhaps we can hear from some of the members of the other parties to see whether that's the case.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Just before we go to Ms. Dabrusin, whose hand is raised, the participants field shows the people who have raised their hand. It also shows it chronologically. Please feel free to use that. We're still in a setting where I can see everybody's hand. We will very likely transition into a hybrid format soon, so it will be more difficult to see people raising their hand. Please use the participants list and then the "raise hand" feature, which is the most transparent and chronologically accurate way to measure that.

Ms. Sahota, that was your previous hand-raise, I would imagine. Please lower your hand.

Ms. Dabrusin, go ahead, please.

• (1545)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): In fact, I was not going to speak to this point.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I raised my hand again, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Please go ahead, Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I was going to speak to this issue of the third vice-chair. It did come up in the 43rd Parliament as well. This issue was tossed around at every committee in the last session. There was no real conclusion to this issue. It eventually went to the Board of Internal Economy. At that point, there was an issue in terms of how they would create this position so that it didn't violate the Parliament of Canada Act in terms of pay. The pay wasn't going to be increased in case more than one person ended up in this position. Anyway, the issue became so complicated, I don't know if there was ever a decision made by BOIE on that.

Is anyone aware of whether there was a decision from BOIE on that issue last session?

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, thank you for putting that question to the room.

I'm advised that the phone line is working now. The staff is able to hear us.

Let's go with the list we have: Mr. Diotte, Mr. Oliphant and Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Mr. Chair, this is related, although I'll leave it up to you to decide whether we should discuss this now. I have a real concern that my chief of staff cannot join this meeting via Zoom. I don't understand the concept of that, because she could be in my meeting if we were all in the same room.

I think we all agree that we want to make this virtual session as close to a true parliamentary session as possible, so I'd like to get some answers on that and find out whether or not our main staffer can join us in these committee meetings.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Diotte. We'll get clarification on that question.

I have Mr. Oliphant, Mr. Bergeron and Mr. Harris.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): With respect to the third vice-chair position, my understanding is that there has not been consistency about this. Obviously, with Canada-China we do have that. It is a special committee and there are different rules that apply to a special committee. My understanding is that the financial arrangements are such that there is compensation for the chair and for first and second vice-chairs, but there would not be compensation available for a third vice-chair.

My concern is that we should have consistency among the standing committees on this. Again, Garnett will be surprised that I'm sounding like a fundamentalist, but I think the Standing Orders are there and should be respected. My understanding is, and I could be corrected, that the Board of Internal Economy did not add any more financial resources for a third vice-chair. I know it's been brought up at a couple of the committees, but not all of the committees, so I think there's an inconsistency.

That doesn't mean we don't want Mr. Harris's full participation all the time. However, I think calling it a vice-chair would be premature, in my personal opinion.

• (1550)

The Chair: Mr. Oliphant, thank you.

Let me quickly circle back to Mr. Diotte's point.

Mr. Diotte, I'm advised that the arrangement with respect to chiefs of staff or staff colleagues was made through the whips. The primary constraint was one of technology, in the sense that it really puts an additional stress on the system at this point that may render it vulnerable, as surprising as that may seem, given that we have a large number of people joining in the House itself, but that is the constraint at the moment. Your point is certainly taken on board. If that changes, we will advise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): I'd like to raise three points.

First of all, Mr. Chair, the process for my election has begun, and I don't believe it has been completed. Am I to understand that I have indeed been elected? I'm asking because before the election of the second vice-chair was confirmed, we moved to another question, a legitimate question, from Mr. Harris.

What am I to understand, Mr. Chair? Depending on your answer, I'd like to speak again later, if I may.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron. I believe you were elected to the position, but I will check with the clerk.

Should we resume the discussion on the potential election of Mr. Harris?

[*English*]

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The question was never put on Mr. Bergeron's election, so if you'd like to do that, you may.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, if I can, I will exercise the prerogative of the chair to put the motion forward that Mr. Bergeron be elected as vice-chair of the committee.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I don't want to pre-empt a ruling by you at the request of the clerk, but there were two nominations. What I said was that if there was no agreement to have another vice-chair, I would turn down the nomination, but that was conditional.

I'm not trying to play games here; I just don't want to have an election now and say we're not going to talk about this anymore, because I have something more to say about it. I will not stand in

the way of Mr. Bergeron becoming the second vice-chair, nor will I cause an election. However, we did enter into this discussion and, since I was on the speakers list, I don't want to pre-empt having the final say, having been cut off by a ruling for which we don't yet know the outcome.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, point understood and point taken. That was my comment to the clerk, that the discussion about a potential third vice-chair was continuing but that, at a minimum, we would elect Mr. Bergeron. I think that's the will of the committee. You have my commitment that you will come in and make your point after that.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you. That being said, I will ask that my name not be put forward for a position as vice-chair in this particular election.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Are there any comments, remarks or opposition to Mr. Bergeron being put forward as a vice-chair of the committee?

(Motion agreed to)

Madam Clerk, we will declare Mr. Bergeron the second vice-chair of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Congratulations, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

I will pass the word back to the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: May I continue, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes. Then it will be Mr. Harris's turn.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all my colleagues. I'm sorry Mr. Chong found himself in a difficult position with regard to Mr. Harris and me.

This isn't the first time Mr. Harris and I have been in this situation. I would like to remind the members of this committee that, in the previous session, we had indeed decided, as a committee, to add a third vice-chair position, which was held by Mr. Harris. I understand there was an agreement in the previous session of Parliament that there would be a third vice-chair from the New Democratic Party.

Accordingly, Mr. Chair, I formally nominate Mr. Harris as third vice-chair of this committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Clerk, we have a motion on the floor that we elect Mr. Harris as third vice-chair.

I made a commitment to give the word back to Mr. Harris.

Please go ahead, Mr. Harris.

• (1555)

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron, for your motion.

The issue of pay seems to come up every now and then, but there's no effect on pay in this particular matter.

Number one, I'm already a vice-chair of the Canada-China committee. If you're vice-chair of one committee, there's no necessity for or interest in the pay for a second situation like this.

We have no interest whatsoever in making money an issue. It's an issue of your involvement in the committee and the role you play in the committee, in terms of both helping to set the agenda and being part of the committee on agenda and procedure to represent your party.

I think the idea of being a vice-chair is an important one with regard to how you represent yourself to the public, and I think it's a good recognition. We feel that it's been very useful in terms of developing policy and working with other people and working with stakeholders.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

I think I have the order right. Mr. Oliphant is next, by a physical waving of hand, and then it will be Ms. Sahota, please.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I just want to check the normal composition of the subcommittee on agenda. Maybe the clerk can help us with that. I know we haven't set our routine motions yet, but I think there is a convention around that. I just want to know how many there are and what our representation is on it.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, would you like to intervene briefly on this point?

I think it's in the routine motions, but it may be different in the routine motion that we passed last time from what the actual convention is.

The Clerk: Thank you.

The routine motion that passed last time was that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure contain five members: the chair and one member from each recognized party.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Clerk.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: If I could just clarify then, what is the benefit of being a third vice-chair? What are we really trying to decide on if the position is already at the subcommittee? I'm truly and genuinely asking that question.

The Chair: Mr. Oliphant, thank you.

We'll leave that question hanging for the moment and go to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

Of course, I understand what Mr. Harris is saying; it could be advantageous to have that position, for many reasons. However, it's true that if you are still included in the subcommittee on agenda, what happens by creating this position is a logistical mess.

I understand that Mr. Harris is saying it's not about pay. Technically, it's not not about pay because, according to the Parliament of Canada Act, they would have to pay anyone who is in the position of vice-chair, whatever that extra bump is. Not doing so would go against the act. The administration could not do it. There is no exception made in the act that you could have a third vice-chair who wouldn't get paid. Right now, it would just be the position of a vice-chair.

Either there would have to be legislation brought in or the act would have to be reformed, but none of that was something that anyone seemed to want to do in the last session. We're still in a position where, if we were to vote in a third vice-chair today, the administration would have to abide by the act and give that wage increase.

That is my understanding, so it does complicate matters. Although the title and the position may have some benefits, I think there's no real practical benefit. In terms of what Mr. Oliphant also said, practically you would still be able to participate and do everything that any of the other parties can do. Having that title would complicate the matter of pay. That's my concern.

Is that what you want to go forward with? I think we should perhaps get an idea from our parties—and perhaps from PROC as well, I don't know—as to whether committees are going to move forward with this position and how we can deal with that element of extra pay.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, thank you very much.

Just on a technical point, I have been asked to let you know that the sound quality is still posing a problem for interpretation. If there is a way for you to switch devices, that would be greatly appreciated.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor.

• (1600)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I must honestly admit that I feel a certain uneasiness about the debate we are currently having. If it's relevant to look at the composition of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure in the previous session, it should be equally relevant to question whether we had a third vice-chair position in the previous session, which was the case.

In the spirit of collaboration, I am concerned that we are beginning our work with a procedural debate on whether or not to reappoint Mr. Harris as vice-chair.

If it's relevant to look at the make-up of the subcommittee, and if we want to work in the same kind of collaborative spirit that prevailed in the previous session, even though we weren't able to continue the work at any great length at the time, it is equally relevant to question whether or not there was a third vice-chair, which was the case.

So I respectfully submit to you, Mr. Chair, that I have submitted a nomination for the approval of the members of this committee. As far as I am aware, there was an agreement in the previous session that the New Democratic Party could obtain the third vice-chair's seat on the standing committees, which was the case with ours. As far as I know, unless the clerk corrects me, that was the case in all the standing committees.

So I don't understand why this is a problem this time, when it was a stumbling block that we had managed to overcome, in a spirit of collaboration, during the previous session. I don't understand why this stumbling block is coming back to haunt us this time, when we resolved it in the previous session.

I invite members, in the spirit of collaboration, to grant Mr. Harris the status he held in the previous session, that of third vice-chair of our committee, so that we can finally get down to what the Prime Minister likes to call "real business", or what will be the work of this committee over the coming weeks and months.

Can we quickly resolve this technical issue which, if we continue to discuss it to death, will be a stumbling block that we'll have to carry for some time to come? I wouldn't want us to start this committee's work on a misperception. I'd like us to be able to begin this work in a spirit of collaboration between the four political parties on this committee.

[English]

The Chair: Now it's my turn to be on mute.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Harris, Ms. Dabrusin and Ms. Sahota are next on the list but, first, I think the clerk wants to speak on that matter.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

In the previous session, we did not have a third vice-chair. The third vice-chair position was only for the Special Committee on—

Mr. Jack Harris: I can't hear.

The Clerk: Can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes.

The Clerk: So Foreign Affairs and International Development did not have a third vice-chair position in the previous session. It was only the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations that had that position, and that was done by motion from the House forming the special committee. The Standing Orders do not allow for a third vice-chair.

There was a report from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in the last session. That report was never concurred in, so currently there is no mechanism by which standing committees can elect a third vice-chair.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, just before we go to the rest of the list, does that effectively render Mr. Bergeron's motion inadmissible?

The Clerk: Yes, I would suggest that it would be an inadmissible motion, as it is contrary to the Standing Orders.

The Chair: Okay.

I'd like to hear from Mr. Harris, Ms. Dabrusin, and Ms. Sahota, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Well, it's an interesting discussion. I know that there was no final concurrence in the BOIE, but that doesn't mean that a committee can't make a decision, pass a motion and let the BOIE and the House deal with it one way or the other. If it is the wish of this committee, the committee can elect a position of vice-chair, as was done in the past, and let them deal with it.

I will assure you that this has nothing to do.... In fact, it might create a situation in which the BOIE and the House may have to do something about it, because I have no intention nor would I have anything to do with accepting any money for the position. I think this would be an opportunity for the House to make a ruling on it. We have a minority Parliament, and the spirit of co-operation in a minority Parliament, the recognition of the value that each party brought to this Parliament and the hope that we would all work together were evident in the motion brought by the Conservative Party back in December. I think it was the first motion that was voted on in the House with the establishment of the Canada-China committee. I think the precedent was established there.

We are a very closely related committee. The foreign affairs committee could play a good role in doing the same thing with respect to this committee, and it may bring about the change that's required.

That's all I have to say on it.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, thank you.

I have next on the list Ms. Dabrusin, Ms. Sahota, and Mr. Oliphant.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I propose that we actually move to routine motions, given that we've just been told by the clerk that the motion we're discussing is not in order. It looks as though there's a larger issue that needs to be sorted out through the BOIE with regard to the right procedure to figure it out. We don't have standing to be able to appoint a third vice-chair, so I think we should move forward.

I have a number of routine motions that—

Mr. Jack Harris: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I've just been advised by our whip's office that in fact PROC did report to the House on the third vice-chair, but the report was not concurred in by the House because the motion was not brought because of prorogation. So that's where PROC is at the moment, and that's where they were before prorogation.

Perhaps a decision by this committee or a motion by this committee that might be of use would come back to the House for consideration. It's not a question that PROC did not come to a decision. They came to a decision and they had a report to the House, but there was no motion for concurrence in the House before prorogation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris. That may actually be helpful.

I'd like to hear the end of Ms. Dabrusin's intervention, then Ms. Sahota and Mr. Oliphant.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: In fact, Mr. Chair, I'd like to proceed with motions to actually constitute our committee and the rules for our committee, because we've already been told that there is no standing for this motion.

If I may, I would like to begin with bringing routine motions. The first is on analyst services:

That the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

The Chair: I will seek the advice of the clerk.

Madam Clerk, we have a motion on the floor that has not been disposed of, and now we have a second motion for going to routine proceedings. Perhaps I could seek your assistance on the sequence that we are to deal with this, please.

• (1610)

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Right now, the information has been put before the committee regarding the third vice-chair. It would be up to you to make a ruling on whether that motion is admissible. If it is inadmissible, then you are free to move on to other items.

The Chair: Keeping in mind the conversation that's taking place and not wanting to foreclose on arguments that need to be made, I will rule the motion inadmissible. I stand to be challenged on that. If that's the case, then that may well be resolved at a later time. The points have been made thoughtfully and have been heard by all members, but Ms. Dabrusin has put a motion forward to do really what we are here to do today, which is to go through the routine motions to constitute our committee and to get us into the starting blocks.

I will rule the motion by Mr. Bergeron inadmissible. I stand to be challenged on that, if that is the will of the committee. I propose to move forward with the motion by Ms. Dabrusin to go into routine motions.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I had brought forward my motion on analysts.

The Chair: Would you reread the motion just for clarity, Ms. Dabrusin, please?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I'll read it in French because Mr. Bergeron has heard a lot of English so far.

That the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there debate on this motion? Seeing none, all in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

If I could take the prerogative of the chair to intervene very briefly, Ms. Dabrusin, with my apologies, as there are many other routine motions that we need to get through. At this point the committee is officially formed, and I would like to take a moment to

welcome and thank our hard-working and amazing House of Commons team, beginning with our clerk, Erica Pereira, and then also our analysts, Nadia Faucher, Allison Goody and Billy Joe—B.J.—Siekierski.

I would like to give them the opportunity to make a few remarks to the committee should they choose to.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll start.

I'm Erica Pereira. I've been a clerk here at the House of Commons for 14 years, and I will be your clerk for this session. I'm looking forward to it.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much.

I'm not sure if we have our analysts on camera at the moment. If we do.... Yes, I see them.

Please, if any of you would like to say a few words to the committee, you're welcome to.

Ms. Allison Goody (Analyst): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Allison Goody. I'm looking forward to working with you and all the members of the foreign affairs committee this session. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Faucher, you have the floor.

Ms. Nadia Faucher (Analyst): Good afternoon. I'm Nadia Faucher, and I am pleased to be supporting the work of the committee again this year. I'm part of the international affairs team, as is Ms. Goody.

The Chair: Welcome, Ms. Faucher.

[*English*]

Finally, we have Billy Joe—B.J.—Siekierski.

Mr. Billy Joe Siekierski (Analyst): I'm B.J. I apologize for not having a headset. I'm getting it next week.

[*Translation*]

I'm also looking forward to starting working with you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Equally, I'd like to thank our interpreters and our technicians.

We look forward to working with all of you over the weeks and months to come.

Without further ado, to continue through routine motions, I will pass the floor back to Madam Dabrusin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Let's continue with the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure.

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five members, namely the Chair and one member from each recognized party; and that the subcommittee work in a spirit of collaboration.

[English]

The Chair: Members have heard the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The motion is carried.

Madam Clerk, I am just checking with you on whether this is an acceptable way of doing this. I think I have everybody in view. If there were opposition, it would be very easily identified.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Dabrusin, I will go back to you.

• (1615)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Excuse me, Chair, to clarify, I am pressing the raised hand on the lower hand button. Would you rather that I show my hand?

The Chair: I was looking at both. I didn't realize you were trying to comment.

Please, Ms. Fry, go ahead.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I have been pressing the raise hand, the lower hand button, but if you would rather we do it with a show of hands like this, let me know so I can do one thing or the other.

The Chair: In debate, where order is a bit more important, I prefer to go with the raise hand to make sure I have the right sequence and chronology of intervention. During the polling, it is less important that it be done by the raise hand; it could be done just by a show of hands, because I have everybody in my view field at the moment.

Ms. Dabrusin, please.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: The motion on meeting without a quorum reads as follows:

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the government, but when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present.

The Chair: I have Ms. Fry who has her hand up, and then Mr. Harris.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I'm sorry; I did not have my hand up. I lowered my hand in your participant box and I didn't put my hand up. I thought you were asking for the vote, and I was going to vote yes. Sorry about that.

The Chair: It's all good.

Mr. Harris, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: I would like to move an amendment that there be "two members of the opposition and two members of the government" present for the hearing of evidence.

The Chair: There is an amendment on the floor to the motion that Ms. Dabrusin just read on quorum.

Is there any discussion on the amendment?

Mr. Jack Harris: I would say further that this has been adopted by other committees during this round.

The Chair: Okay, seeing no debate, all in favour of the amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The motion as amended carries.

Ms. Dabrusin.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: The next motion is on time for opening remarks and questioning of witnesses and reads:

That witnesses be given 10 minutes for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the first round of questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six minutes for the first questioner of each party as follows: Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois and New Democratic Party. For the second and subsequent rounds, the order and time for questioning be as follows: Conservative Party, five minutes, Liberal Party, five minutes, Conservative Party, five minutes, Liberal Party, five minutes, Bloc Québécois, two and a half minutes, New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes.

I understand that the opposition might have some amendments and am happy to listen to those if there are.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dabrusin.

Is there any debate?

I see Mr Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: I will defer to Mr. Bergeron, if he wishes to go before me.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I believe it was the practice in the previous session and in other committees to reverse the second and third rounds so that the second is now for the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party, with two and a half minutes each. This avoided the situation where there was no time left for the third round, in which the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party would normally have spoken.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

Is there other debate or comment?

Mr. Jack Harris: I would like to speak to that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Please, go ahead.

Mr. Jack Harris: The motion would be to move the two-and-a-half-minute rounds for the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party to be after the first five minutes for the Conservative Party and the five minutes for the Liberal Party. Then it would be Bloc for two and a half minutes, the New Democratic Party for two and a half minutes, the Conservative Party for five minutes and the Liberal Party for five minutes. That would be the second round. The first round would stay the same, at six minutes apiece.

That's been done to ensure that with the second round being only two and a half minutes for the Bloc and also for the NDP they would not be cut off with that very short period of time. It would be more equitably shared. There's a subsequent motion that may be made as well, which is potentially reducing the time of opening statements to make it more compatible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

It's incumbent on me, then, to time those two two-and-a-half-minute interventions quite precisely. There's a bit more latitude in a five-minute intervention than there is in a two-and-a-half-minute intervention. I will do my utmost to give credit to the will of the committee and to implement this proposal if it passes.

Is there any other debate on this? Seeing none, all in favour?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

That carries, and we're back to the main motion.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, I'd like to propose an amendment to the motion: that the witnesses be given five minutes for their opening statements and that whenever possible witnesses provide the committee with their opening statements 72 hours in advance.

The Chair: Is there any debate on the amendment?

Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: There was some discussion in other committees about this particular motion, in that the five minutes may be very useful, particularly if you have three witnesses in a session or something like that, but one of the chairs expressed the view that someone suggested that discretion be used to perhaps increase it. The chair was of the view that this particular motion didn't give the chair any discretion to provide a longer time. There may be occasions when we have only one witness, for example, and "at the discretion of the chair" was inserted before the five minutes or somewhere there, so that the chair had discretion in determining the length of the opening statements. It could be for "five to seven minutes" or some general discretion.

One committee that we met with suggested that it be at the discretion of the chair in consultation with the parties. In fact, on the Canada-China committee, it was in consultation with the vice-chairs, of which I was one. That sort of discretion I think ought to be included in the motion as well if someone has a specific amendment to include that. I wanted to raise that point.

The Chair: From the perspective of the chair, discretion would certainly be appreciated, but I'm not going to sway the debate.

I will pass the floor to Ms. Sahota, please, who is next on the list.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I was going to ask Mr. Chong about the wording. It seems like the wording may be for "72 hours where possible". Perhaps the five-minute portion could also be made "where possible", because there are going to be witnesses who are talking about a very in-depth issue in this committee, perhaps one that we don't have that much background on. Or maybe at times when we have one or two witnesses we could have that flexibility or the chair would have that discretion to afford and give them 10 minutes, perhaps, or seven minutes, or five minutes when we have a larger panel, or where the complexity may be less depending on the issue.

Could the language be modified a bit giving you the discretion, as chair, to only give them five to seven minutes where possible?

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, would you want to go as far as to propose amended language?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes. I guess we could just say that we would give five minutes for opening statements when appropriate or where possible, or five to seven minutes we could even say, with five to seven minutes for opening statements when appropriate, leaving discretion to the chair, and then have the rest of it remain the same.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sahota.

We'll go to Mr. Genuis for comments on this.

• (1620)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just for context, Mr. Chair, Mr. Harris referred to this, and I thought I would specifically mention what we did at the Canada-China committee, because in the meantime I have been pulling up those blues.

At the Canada-China committee, we adopted a motion for five-minute opening statements, so we adopted this motion as is. Then we added to it at the end of the motion to say that the chair would "be authorized to adjust" the amount of time of the opening statements "in consultation with the vice-chairs". I think we might just say "in consultation with the members of the subcommittee" in this case, so that there's just a mechanism for that.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

I just may put a caveat in there that there may be instances when we keep things out of the subcommittee. I don't know if the committee has decided yet to go to the subcommittee on all matters. Sometimes we may decide it in plenary, so maybe it's something slightly more general, but the direction is certainly helpful.

Mr. Chong and Ms. Sahota.

Hon. Michael Chong: Look, I think we should keep it to a single numeral rather than five to seven minutes, but I think we can capture what Ms. Sahota wants to do by simply beginning the sentence with: "that, at the discretion of the chair, witnesses be given five minutes for their opening statements; that, whenever possible, witnesses provide the committee with their opening statements 72 hours in advance". It gives you, as chair, the flexibility, after you informally consult with members of the committee, about extending it beyond five minutes, but it makes it clear that the standard is five minutes. If there's an exceptional circumstance that warrants giving a witness a longer amount of time, Chair, I trust your judgment that you will consult widely and seek a consensus to use your discretion to elongate the time beyond five minutes.

I think that if we begin it with “that, at the discretion of the chair, witnesses be given five minutes for their opening statements; that, whenever possible, witnesses provide the committee with their opening statements 72 hours in advance”, it captures what Madam Sahota wants to do and what we're trying to do here.

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

The conversation went from Ms. Sahota to Mr. Genuis to Mr. Chong, and now we're back to Ms. Sahota.

I have you on the list, Ms. Sahota, and then Mr. Oliphant and Mr. Harris.

Ms. Sahota, please.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I was just going to say that I agree with Mr. Chong. I think this is a very good amendment that he has made. I think the wording is good, and I think we should go with that rather than having the vice-chairs added in, because sometimes as chair you really don't have enough time, depending on the study. Sometimes you're calling witnesses or fitting them in at the last minute. You just may not have enough time to confer on every little detail like that with the vice-chairs. I really like Mr. Chong's wording.

The Chair: Mr. Oliphant, please, and then Mr. Harris.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I'm also fine with the wording with respect to “discretion”, and I can live with five minutes, but I actually think it does a disservice to Canadians who want to appear before our committee. I have been on the other end of the table. I have been a witness appearing at parliamentary committees on important issues and have taken great time to prepare statements.

I think that sometimes it's important to remember that it's not all about us. It's not all about our questions. I do think the five minutes can be extremely limiting to expert witnesses whose opening remarks we want to have. I think that is important. I can live with it, but I hope the committee recognizes that this is about our witnesses, too, and I hope the chair will use that discretion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

I have Mr. Harris and then Ms. Fry.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

I'd like to take the opportunity to echo what Mr. Oliphant is saying. Five minutes is a short time for someone as loquacious as I am, and our experts are dealing with far more complicated topics than we sometimes deal with in our short conversations.

I think perhaps the wording ought to be “subject to the discretion of the chair” instead of “in the discretion of the chair”, because for the five minutes it's not either five or nothing, it's five or more. Saying that “subject to the discretion of the chair” five or more minutes would be given to speak would allow that recognition, if we look at the timing of the first and second rounds, for example, depending on whether we have one witness or two or three. If you have three, five minutes is as much as you can fit into a certain length of a meeting, but if there's only one witness.... Often, obviously, we have ministers speaking for 10 minutes or more, and introductions.

I think there is a fair bit of discretion used in these meetings. I think it would be better to state it as not quite open-ended, but that it can be as low as five minutes and it can be longer at the discre-

tion of the chair, and that perhaps, subject to the discretion of the chair, five minutes or more may be allocated to the speaker. That would give us some flexibility without mentioning more than one number.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Ms. Fry.

• (1630)

Hon. Hedy Fry: I want to agree with Rob Oliphant. I think the message we want to give as a standing committee is that we really care about what experts have to tell us. The committees are for Canadians, to give us input and information; they're not supposed to cater to the needs of the committee members.

I think giving that strong message that we really like to see... I would like to say “seven minutes” according to the discretion of the chair. Some people won't use the seven minutes. It sounds generous when we say seven minutes. It sounds like we really care. I also like “the discretion of the Chair”, because nobody opposes this chair. Everyone seems to have confidence in the chair. Let us show that we have confidence in the chair and let's show our witnesses that we care about what they have to say.

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

I see no further hands raised on this part of the debate.

Are there any other comments waiting on this issue?

If not, could I ask either Ms. Sahota or perhaps Madam Clerk to reread the text of the amended motion?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think Madam Clerk would be great to do that.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What I have right now is as follows:

That, at the discretion of the Chair, witnesses be given 5 or more minutes for their opening statement, that wherever possible the witnesses provide their statement to the Committee 72 hours in advance; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the first round of questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six minutes for the first questioner of each party as follows: Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois and New Democratic Party.

Then, in the second half, we have:

For the second and subsequent rounds, the order and time for the questioning be as follows: Conservative Party, five minutes, Liberal Party, five minutes, Bloc Québécois, two and a half minutes, New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes, Conservative Party, five minutes, Liberal Party, five minutes.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

Ms. Dabrusin, thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: This one deals with document distribution:

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the committee only when the documents are available in both official languages and that witnesses be advised accordingly.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dabrusin.

[English]

Is there any debate on this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Dabrusin.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I love this one: “Working Meals”. Maybe we can get snacks delivered.

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

The Chair: Is there any debate on this motion, which was conceived pre-COVID but will be relevant as we go into a hybrid setting?

I see none.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Dabrusin.

[Translation]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Here's the motion concerning the travel, accommodation and living expenses of witnesses:

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two representatives per organization; provided that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the Chair.

The Chair: We have heard the motion.

[English]

Is there any debate?

(Motion agreed to)

The motion carries.

Ms. Dabrusin.

• (1635)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: The next motion is on access to in camera meetings:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to have one staff member at an in camera meeting and that one additional person from each House officer's office be allowed to be present.

The Chair: Is there debate on this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Dabrusin.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: The next is on transcripts of in camera meetings:

That one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee or by their staff.

The Chair: Is there any debate on transcripts?

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Dabrusin.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: The next is on notices of motion, which reads as follows:

That a 48 hours' notice, interpreted as two nights, shall be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, provided that (1) the notice be filed with the clerk of the committee no later than 4:00 p.m. (EST) from Monday to Friday; that (2) the motion be distributed to Members in both official languages by the clerk on the same day the said notice was transmitted if it was received no later than the deadline hour; and that (3) notices received after the deadline hour or on non-business days be deemed to have been received during the next business day and that when the committee is travelling on official business, no substantive motions may be moved.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dabrusin.

Members have heard the text of this slightly longer motion. Is there any debate on this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Dabrusin.

[Translation]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Here is the motion on purchasing gifts.

That the committee be authorized to purchase gifts to be presented to foreign hosts and visiting delegations.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any debate on this motion on gifts?

I see none.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Dabrusin.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: The next is a longer one on orders of reference from the House respecting bills:

That, in relation to Orders of Reference from the House respecting Bills, (a) the clerk of the committee shall, upon the committee receiving such an Order of Reference, write to each Member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee to invite those Members to file with the clerk of the committee, in both official languages, any amendments to the Bill, which is the subject of the said Order, which they would suggest that the committee consider; (b) suggested amendments filed, pursuant to paragraph (a), at least 48 hours prior to the start of clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill to which the amendments relate shall be deemed to be proposed during the said consideration, provided that the committee may, by motion, vary this deadline in respect of a given Bill; and (c) during the clause-by-clause consideration of a Bill, the Chair shall allow a Member who filed suggested amendments, pursuant to paragraph (a), an opportunity to make brief representations in support of them.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dabrusin.

The members of the committee have heard the motion.

[English]

Is there debate on the motion?

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Chair, but I don't recall seeing this routine motion. Would it be possible to read it again before we proceed?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Dabrusin, could you reread it?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Okay. I'll read it again.

Here's the routine motion dealing with orders of reference from the House respecting bills:

That, in relation to Orders of Reference from the House respecting Bills,

(a) the clerk of the committee shall, upon the committee receiving such an Order of Reference, write to each Member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee to invite those Members to file with the clerk of the committee, in both official languages, any amendments to the Bill, which is the subject of the said Order, which they would suggest that the committee consider;

(b) suggested amendments filed, pursuant to paragraph (a), at least 48 hours prior to the start of clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill to which the amendments relate shall be deemed to be proposed during the said consideration, provided that the committee may, by motion, vary this deadline in respect of a given Bill; and

(c) during the clause-by-clause consideration of a Bill, the Chair shall allow a Member who filed suggested amendments, pursuant to paragraph (a), an opportunity to make brief representations in support of them.

● (1640)

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

Is there any debate on the motion?

Go ahead, Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: For Mr. Bergeron's benefit, I will say that this rule was created for Ms. May and the Green Party in the House of Commons.

Two Parliaments ago, Ms. May introduced almost 2,000 budget amendments in the House of Commons. We voted on each amendment for two days. At that time, there was no rule allowing the Green Party to table amendments in committee, which is why this rule now exists in all committees.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chong, for that important historical clarification.

Is there any debate on the motion?

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I was just going to briefly clarify this, because the language that it used seemed to say "a member of Parliament who is a member of a caucus that is not part of this committee". Does this apply to independent members as well?

Madam Clerk, could you clarify?

The Chair: Yes, please, Madam Clerk. That's an important question for independent members.

The Clerk: Yes, Mr. Chair.

Technically, the Green Party members are all sitting as independent members. You have to have a certain number of people per party to be a recognized party. It does include all independent members.

Hon. Michael Chong: I have a point of clarification, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, please.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm sorry to be splitting hairs here, but the three members of the Green Party are sitting as members of parties in the House of Commons but not members of recognized parties in the House of Commons. That's a fine distinction. They are sitting as party members, but not as recognized party members.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

With respect to independents, I think they're captured by the fact that it's a member "who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee". We're inclusive in the sense that it applies to all independents. That's a point worth noting for the committee.

Is there any other debate? Are there any other questions or clarifications required before we vote on this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

Go ahead, Ms. Dabrusin.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: I have one last one, on in camera meetings:

That the committee may meet in camera only for the following purposes:

(a) to consider a draft report;

(b) to attend briefings concerning national security;

(c) to consider lists of witnesses;

(d) for any other reason, with the unanimous consent of the committee;

That all votes taken in camera, with the exception of votes regarding the consideration of draft reports, be recorded in the Minutes of Proceedings, including how each member voted when recorded votes are requested;

That any motion to sit in camera is debatable and amendable.

The Chair: The members have heard the text of this motion. Is there debate on this motion?

Mr. Harris, go ahead.

● (1645)

Mr. Jack Harris: I would raise whether.... The tradition has been that the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure discusses more than witnesses and lists of witnesses, but their deliberations are in camera and they often talk about what studies should be done, in what order, and all of those things. These are matters that are normally in camera.

I haven't seen this motion, and I'm a little bit uncomfortable dealing with complex motions without having the wording in front of us. We did have the routine motions because they had been circulated, but I haven't seen this motion and I don't know whether the chair is able to assure me that the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure is included in the list of in camera meetings.

The Chair: This is an important point, Mr. Harris. Thank you.

Let me ask our clerk, not only for clarification of that point but also perhaps for her views on the tenor of this motion.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is a new motion to me. I have just received the wording of it, so I can circulate it to the members of the committee if you give me two minutes.

In terms of the motion itself, there are some issues in particular with this committee that I would flag to the members. For example, Foreign Affairs and International Development could deal with situations that have diplomatic repercussions. For example, if you are trying to study a situation in country X versus a situation in country Y, that would be recorded, so people would know that you made a decision regarding one country over another or one situation over another. If that happened in camera, your recorded division would be included, but the proceedings of everything would be in camera, so you would not be able to discuss your reasoning behind making those decisions without violating privilege.

That one major diplomatic consideration might be something that I would flag to the committee members.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Clerk, for that clarification. Are there any views by members on this motion, or any debate?

I have Mr. Harris and Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Jack Harris: I don't think the committee should decide this today. We haven't had time to review and think about it. I don't know where it's coming from or what its purpose is overall. Can I move that this be tabled? I think Mr. Oliphant had a motion that we adjourn debate on this particular motion.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, with your indulgence, we'll have Mr. Oliphant come in with his views. I think that may be the direction the members are exploring.

Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, my understanding is that a motion to adjourn debate is not debatable. Am I correct in that?

The Chair: It isn't, but I don't know if it was put in those terms.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Harris, would you move a motion to adjourn debate?

Mr. Jack Harris: Well, I don't know. Maybe I'm pre-empting Mr. Oliphant making the same motion. I prefer to have the motion dealt with, but I don't mind him having his views.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I think Mr. Harris and I are on the same page here. My own side may be upset with me, but I would like time to think about this. I have been in many situations where in the middle of a meeting we recognized that we were getting testimony from a person who was perhaps vulnerable with respect to human rights. I had meetings in which we had LGBTQ witnesses from another country who had wanted their identities protected and we didn't know that. There are several situations. We've had some members of the Yazidi community who wanted their identities protected but we weren't prepared for that. There are several issues. I would like a little bit of time to think about that.

So, perhaps either Mr. Harris or I can move a motion to adjourn debate on this so that we can think about it and bring it back. I would just like a little bit of time with it. I have probably upset some on my own team about that.

The Chair: I have a sense that a motion to adjourn debate is imminent, but it hasn't been brought yet.

• (1650)

Mr. Jack Harris: I move it.

The Chair: Mr. Harris has moved that debate be now adjourned on this motion.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'd like to move some additional routine motions that were adopted in this committee in the first session of the 43rd Parliament.

The first routine motion I would like to move is:

That all meetings other than those deemed in camera be televised or webcast where possible.

The Chair: There is a motion on the floor, which members have heard. Is there debate on Mr. Chong's motion?

(Motion agreed to)

Go ahead, Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move another motion concerning routine motions.

[*Translation*]

It calls for the creation of a subcommittee on international human rights and reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Orders 108(1) and 108(2), a Subcommittee on International Human Rights to be chaired by a member elected by the subcommittee, be established to inquire into matters relating to the promotion of respect for international human rights, as may be referred to it by the committee;

That, the subcommittee be chaired by a member of the government and be composed of eight members or associate members of which four shall be government members, two shall be from the Conservative Party, one from the Bloc Québécois and one from the New Democratic Party, to be named following the usual consultations with the Whips;

[*English*]

That, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development be granted the authority to print from day to day such papers and evidence as may be ordered by them, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a).

That, the subcommittee be empowered to send for persons, papers and records, to receive evidence, to sit during a time when the committee is not sitting in Ottawa, to sit when the committee is sitting outside the Parliamentary Precinct and to sit during periods when the House stands adjourned; and

That, the Chair of the subcommittee meet with the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure of the committee at their mutual discretion.

Mr. Chair, this is exactly the same motion that was adopted in the first session of the 43rd Parliament.

The Chair: Mr. Chong, thank you for bringing the motion, and thank you for clarifying that point, because that would have been my question to the clerk, but you've pre-empted it. Thank you very much.

Is there debate on this motion?

I have Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: This is not debate. I just wanted the clerk to confirm, because it is lengthy, that it is identical to the previous version.

The Clerk: It is.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Are there any other points, debate, questions or clarification on this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

Thank you, Mr. Chong.

That takes us through routine motions.

Colleagues, I'm wondering if anybody would like to raise—

I have Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: I don't have it in front of me, but there was a motion with respect to media as well, which I don't think we heard today. I didn't come prepared with a list of potential routine motions, but I would assume that it is a similar idea which we ought to consider. I don't have it right in front of me, but maybe the clerk would have access to the motion.

The Chair: Let's briefly verify that, Madam Clerk. Is it something that you have at your fingertips? If not, we can circle back. If somebody would like to introduce that motion in its text as it's written, that's something we will contemplate.

Mr. Harris, you're not moving it right now, I understand, because you don't have the text.

Mr. Jack Harris: No. I don't have the text in front of me, so I can't do that.

The Chair: Okay.

Let me go, then, to Ms. Sahota, please, who is next on the list.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you. I'm waving and lowering my hand quite quickly, but thanks for noticing that.

Since we're through with the routine motions, Mr. Chair, I just want to ask whether this would be the appropriate time for me to move my motion for a proposed study. It's one that was brought up in the last session as well. Is that okay with you?

The Chair: Please, Ms. Sahota, go ahead.

• (1655)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I have circulated this motion in English and French, since I am moving it from the floor. I just wanted to make sure everyone had it. I also want to thank the clerk for pointing out an addition I was able to make to it so that some feedback that the NDP and the Bloc had in the previous session is also incorporated into this motion.

I'll just read it out loud at this point:

“That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study on challenges facing populations living in fragile con-

texts, including an examination of issues such as education of refugee and displaced children; gender equality—

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, with your indulgence, I'm getting a message that interpretation is not able to hear you. Is there any way you can bring the microphone up closer and try again with slightly greater clarity? Hopefully that will allow the interpreters to do their work.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes, absolutely. I will try to go more slowly as well. I need help with IT on my other device, so I won't be able to switch over to it. I'll start again so that it can be interpreted appropriately.

The motion is:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study on challenges facing populations living in fragile contexts, including an examination of issues such as education of refugee and displaced children; gender equality in fragile contexts; children on the move; children in conflict; child protection; children and peacebuilding; and other related issues including the effects of COVID-19, resource scarcity, health and nutrition; examining such cases and conflicts as Syria; Yemen; Myanmar; Venezuela; Ethiopia; and Afghanistan; that the concept note prepared by the Library of Parliament in the first session of the 43rd Parliament serve as the scope for this study; and that the Committee report its findings back to the House.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, thank you very much. I understand there may still be problems with the interpretation. I understand that you circulated the motion in both official languages through the clerk, so maybe that will help us bridge the gap.

[*Translation*]

Did anyone listening have problems with the interpretation?

[*English*]

Were members able to hear and understand the text of the motion?

Monsieur Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'm told that there were indeed problems with interpretation for those listening remotely.

The Chair: Okay, but it was working properly for you?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I listened to the original version this time.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Clerk, we're in your hands on what needs to be done to make sure that everybody heard this properly. Within the group of members that we have here, my understanding is that the members were able to hear the motion. I have a list of interventions for debate on this motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron, you will be up first. Then, it will be Mr. Chong's turn.

[English]

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If it's okay with you, I'll just bring the motion up, and I can read it in French.

The Chair: If that would be helpful, definitely, go ahead.

[Translation]

The Clerk: I'm ready. The text of the motion is as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study on challenges facing populations living in fragile contexts, including an examination of issues such as education of refugee and displaced children; gender equality in fragile contexts; children on the move; children in conflict; child protection; children and peacebuilding; and other related issues including the effects of COVID-19, resource scarcity, health and nutrition; examining such cases and conflicts as Syria; Yemen; Myanmar; Venezuela; Ethiopia; and Afghanistan; that the concept note prepared by the Library of Parliament in the first session of the 43rd Parliament serve as the scope for this study; and that the Committee report its findings back to the House.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Clerk.

We have four colleagues who would like to speak to the motion. We'll hear from Mr. Bergeron first, and then Mr. Chong.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, first I would like to make a general comment.

We had indeed agreed to carry out this study in addition to a study, which was to be shorter, on updating a study from the last Parliament about democracy, but the pandemic happened.

During the pandemic, Mr. Levitt, the committee chair at the time, communicated fairly regularly with the vice-chairs on an informal basis. I believe everyone agreed that the topics we had identified for this committee's work were probably less relevant in the context of a pandemic and given the warnings from the World Health Organization, the WHO, about potential future pandemics.

Consequently, believing that we would have the opportunity to reconvene and reassess everything, we had informally agreed that we would consider how coordination by the international community could help us contain this pandemic and prevent those that the WHO had already warned us about.

In anticipation of that, I had prepared a motion for proposal. I do not know if you want me to present it now, Mr. Chair. A few minutes ago, I sent it to all members of this committee, including the clerk, in both official languages. If I may, Mr. Chair, I will read it and you can tell me what we will ultimately do with it.

In light of the informal discussions we had about the fact that the studies we had decided to conduct before the pandemic might be a little outdated, I propose:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the mobilization and coordination of the international community—including action taken internationally by the Canadian government—to contain this pandemic and to prevent ones that the WHO has already warned humanity about.

Of course, since I quite agreed with the earlier decision to conduct a study on vulnerable populations, you will understand that I have no objection in principle to us undertaking our work on this topic. However, I'm concerned that, if we were to choose such a topic, some may say that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development is not entirely in tune with the current concerns of the international community, which revolve more around the current pandemic and preventing future pandemics, in light of what we have experienced and are still experiencing in this pandemic.

So, to remain relevant to the news and concerns of the day, Mr. Chair, I wonder if it might not be more appropriate to follow up on the informal discussions that had taken place between the chair and vice-chairs during the lockdown, and instead focus on how to mobilize the international community to contain the current pandemic and put in place measures to prevent future pandemics. That's why I have submitted this motion to you.

I therefore leave it in your hands, Mr. Chair, and reiterate that I agree, in principle, with the motion our colleague put forward, because I did agree the last time. Perhaps a few minor adjustments could be made in the French. For example, I would replace the word “fragile” with the word “vulnérable”, and I would include the word “notamment” in the list of countries. I believe that is what was agreed to.

However, in light of what has happened and the informal discussions we have had, I wonder if it is still as relevant for us to begin our work with this study, given what the whole of humanity has faced for a number of months now and is still facing.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron, for your very important comment.

[English]

I think all of us are turning our minds to the relevance of COVID-19 and how we can adjust and adapt our studies accordingly, recognizing there will be overlaps and a lot of fluidity in terms of the subjects we're thinking about and those you are bringing forward, so your point is very well taken.

I see that Ms. Sahota has put herself back in the queue. I think she wants to respond to your comments—I'm assuming in a very constructive way—but before we go to her, we have Mr. Chong, Mr. Genuis and Mr. Harris.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There are a number of competing ideas coming from members of this committee about what we should study. We have the motion on the floor from Ms. Sahota. We just got a notice from Monsieur Bergeron about what he would like to study. I'm going to suggest a path forward for the committee and hopefully we can get a consensus on that.

I think what we should do is defer all these potential studies to the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, so that the group of five of us—including you, Mr. Chair—can hash out what this committee is going to study in the coming months, as opposed to dealing with it right now.

The other thing I'd like to put on the table, before this meeting adjourns today and after we have disposed of this motion from Ms. Sahota, is that I would like us to call the two ministers responsible for the estimates in front of our committee. As you know, Parliament has not sat regularly since mid-March, and I believe it a fundamental responsibility of parliamentary committees to review the estimates. We have estimates that are in front of this committee. I understand that the period of supply finishes on November 27, when they will be deemed automatically reported back to the House, so I think we should call separately both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Development to explain the estimates they have requested of Parliament.

I know we're not going to deal with that right now, because we're on Ms. Sahota's motion, but before we adjourn today, I'd like to at least see if there is a consensus within the committee to proceed and give the clerk something to work on when the committee adjourns today.

To that end, I'd like to move an amendment to this motion in order to give some clarity about what I'm proposing. This amendment would be in front of the motion that Ms. Sahota has just presented. The amendment I would like to move is the following:

That motions for consideration of future business by the subcommittee be submitted to the clerk no later than end of business day Thursday October 15, that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure meet this Friday, October 16, to discuss future committee business and that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure report back to the committee next week.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

• (1710)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I will begin by saying that I'm completely in agreement with the intent of Mr. Chong's amendment to Ms. Sahota's motion. However, I don't believe it's an amendment; I think it is a completely different kettle of fish, which I would like you to rule on in a moment.

That being said, I think we could work our way out of this quite easily by withdrawing for the moment both Mr. Bergeron's and Madam Sahota's suggestions for work and considering this as a motion that Mr. Chong is bringing forward. I think it's quite good. It may actually be two motions, in my humble opinion. It may be a motion to invite each of our two ministers to appear before us for estimates, which I believe the government side would be completely in favour of, just to put that out there. Then everyone could present their motions on potential studies, have them go to the sub-

committee on agenda and procedure and then have that committee report back.

I'm always a little nervous about telling the chair when to set a meeting. We could advise the chair that a meeting on Friday would be useful, knowing it is at the call of the chair that those meetings happen.

The spirit of this, I think, would move our committee along. It would allow us to take Mr. Bergeron's important issue and Madam Sahota's important issue, and other important issues that anybody else could raise, and put them into a hopper, and then the subcommittee could come back with a good initial work plan for approval by this whole committee.

I'm not wanting to stop discussion, but I'm kind of wanting to stop discussion.

Mr. Chong is smiling.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have Mr. Genuis, Mr. Harris and Ms. Sahota on the list.

However, to untangle what is not quite yet a cascade of motions procedurally, Madam Clerk, would it be best if Ms. Sahota were to withdraw her motion in favour of the suggestions of Mr. Oliphant and Mr. Chong, or can we get there in a more expeditious way to achieve what I think is emerging as a common view?

Before we answer that definitively, I want to hear from Mr. Genuis and Mr. Harris, and Ms. Sahota as well.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Currently the motion of Ms. Sahota is before the committee. If she wishes to withdraw it, then it would take the unanimous consent of the committee to withdraw that and move to the consideration of deferring things to the subcommittee or to Monsieur Bergeron's motion, or however you choose to proceed.

The Chair: Okay. I was hoping to get to the question of whether Mr. Chong's amendment is in fact an amendment, and if I have to rule on that, I certainly will.

Let me go to Mr. Genuis and Mr. Harris and then Ms. Sahota, and then hopefully we'll have a complete set of views on the table for what to do next.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'll be brief, then, because I'm in agreement with the Chong-Oliphant plan.

I want to make a general comment, and I mean this as a suggestion from me to the subcommittee. I agree that the subcommittee should discuss these matters.

Recognizing that we're in a minority Parliament, the dissolution of which could come at any time as a result of decisions that are going to be made above our heads, I think we need to look for bite-sized chunks of work that we can accomplish. The motion that we're still officially debating looks at people in fragile contexts, and it gives examples from three continents. From my perspective, it's so broad that it's the kind of megastudy that we risk not completing before events overtake us.

I've learned from experienced members of Parliament that some committees have tried to study issues that were so broad in scope that they ended up coming back to them in Parliament after Parliament after Parliament. That's true in general, and particularly true in the case of minorities.

One suggestion that I want to put forward, again for the subcommittee's consideration, would be that we look at a specific issue of vulnerability. I want to suggest we should look at the issue of Canadian children who are stuck in Kurdish-controlled camps in northern Syria. That is a very specific case of vulnerability, and I think we can identify other specific cases of vulnerability.

If we look at specific issues rather than the general issue of people having challenges in places, we can come up with more targeted recommendations and more actionable results for the government.

I put that forward merely as a suggestion for discussion at the subcommittee. I'm supportive of moving forward with the plan that Mr. Chong and Mr. Oliphant have put forward.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Harris, go ahead, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Well, first of all, I got on the list to start with to suggest an amendment to Ms. Sahota's motion, because she was talking about a very general motion, as Mr. Genuis has pointed out, but what they left out of the list was one that I was moved to add to the list—which now includes Syria, Yemen, Myanmar, Venezuela, Ethiopia and Afghanistan. I would add Palestine to that. That is a country in which there are very vulnerable children. The state has no funds to operate with, and their vulnerability is increasing. I don't think they could be left out of any list dealing with displaced vulnerable refugee children as they exist in Palestine or as Palestinian refugees elsewhere.

I would want to include that as an amendment to the motion, but what I think Mr. Bergeron has given rise to, along with Mr. Chong and Mr. Oliphant—and it has been in my own thoughts as well—is something I've discussed with some members of the committee before.

Back on March 12, just before the House closed, this committee adopted a resolution coming out of a series of proposed studies—none of which have been done, obviously, and some of which may have changed focus as a result of what Mr. Bergeron has to say and the role that Canada might play in the current pandemic crisis. In particular, assisting countries that need help may be a priority.

Priorities is not going to be resolved by coming up with four or five or six different motions today. We do have a plethora of motions that were available. Some of those can be repeated easily, Mr.

Chair, as I'm sure you know, between now and Thursday and be available for our committee on Friday, if it's the will of the committee to study them. That makes perfect sense.

Mr. Chong's motion suggested having both ministers come. I would say yes to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who's been before the committee on supplementary estimates, as well as to the Minister of International Development, who should be here on the estimates but perhaps also on her mandate letter, which would give some broader consideration for questioning by members of the committee. There should be two separate meetings. These could be done fairly early, without a lot of preparation by the analysts, and time would then be available for whatever study is given priority in order to arrange for witnesses and to get that process going.

I think that's a very good approach. The fact that Ms. Sahota's motion may be the first one considered doesn't mean that it's going to be the top priority of the committee. That's ultimately at the will of the committee.

What I think it would be wise to give to the subcommittee to consider is what we had on our plate already, as passed and adopted by the committee. That no longer exists, but the work was done, the thought was given to it and there were a lot of considerations given at that meeting by all members of the subcommittee and by the full committee when it adopted, on March 12, the motion that it did.

I don't think we should throw that work away, but obviously we should also modify it in accordance with the fact that for the last seven months we've been dealing with the extremely difficult coronavirus circumstances worldwide, and clearly that has to change our views. The other studies will be equally interesting for us to give priority to and perhaps modify, along with whatever other new ideas might come up between now and Thursday.

I'm of the view that we should either dispose of Ms. Sahota's motion or refer it to the committee, as amended or not, and deal with it that way. Procedurally at least, we could refer that to the committee if someone wants to move that and get it out that way, without Ms. Sahota having to withdraw it. She may want to withdraw it and submit it to the committee; that's up to her.

Those are my views, sir.

• (1720)

The Chair: Mr. Harris, thank you very much for that thorough commentary.

My unanswered question so far is whether Mr. Chong's amendment constitutes an amendment. I'm mindful of that.

I have the committee's collective view in front of me that there be a subcommittee meeting. I will certainly make myself available. If Friday works for the members of the subcommittee, then it will absolutely happen on Friday.

Also, I think there's a shared view that we will invite the two ministers separately for estimates.

I would like to go back to Ms. Sahota, who is still on the speakers list. Please go ahead.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I will start by saying first of all that I appreciate all the interventions of my colleagues.

First, Mr. Bergeron, I agree that the word “vulnerability” could be replaced in terms of wherever we have “fragile”. That's not a problem. Also, for the countries that are listed, I believe you recommended “including, but not limited to” so that we're not limited to those countries.

I'm not sure if I agree with the extremely narrow focus that Mr. Genus has provided, but I do agree with regard to Mr. Chong's amendments that I'm not sure if those are amendments. I think we would be moving to a motion that he could propose after we dispose of my motion.

I'm just trying to make up my mind as to whether I would withdraw this motion. I guess I need to hear from Mr. Bergeron if he's in agreement, because I don't know if his motion takes.... If I withdraw my motion, then there's no longer an amendment. Would we then be moving to Mr. Bergeron's motion, which he read into the record a little while ago, or would we not be moving to that? Otherwise, would he also be willing to withdraw it and send it to subcommittee? I need clarification on that before I can really make a decision.

I also wanted to say that it seems that through this process we will all be sending a lot of different notices of motion to the subcommittee. I also wanted to clarify that anything that gets decided at the subcommittee is not really a final decision: It would then come back to the whole committee to dispose of, vote on and make the final decision on. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Sahota. Thank you very much. That's right.

I think we're going in a constructive direction here. One thing I should say is that with respect to Friday, I may have been a bit hasty. I'm certainly available, but the meeting is contingent upon resources and the decision of the whips, so I don't want to hold it out that there will be a Friday meeting. If it can happen, I think it would be great to have it earlier rather than later, but it may have to be moved because of logistical constraints.

I would like to pass the word back to Monsieur Bergeron just to clarify if it was in fact a motion. I think he was getting into the text of a motion but may not have moved it as such. It's just so that we can, in the next 10 minutes or so—or less—tackle the question of what to do with Madam Sahota's motion.

Monsieur Bergeron, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I had finished reading my motion and brought it to your attention. That said, if Ms. Sahota withdraws her motion so that it can be referred to the subcommittee, which will likely meet this week, I am prepared to do exactly the same.

In fact, if we want to have a constructive debate and try to arrive at a result in the seven or so minutes remaining for committee business, it would be more logical to refer everything to the subcommittee and come back with a proposal for the entire committee.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much for sharing this opinion.

[*English*]

Madam Sahota, would you like to reply with any final thoughts on what to do next with your motion?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: At this time, I think all I'd like to say is that I recognize my motion is something that the analysts had helped to work on with the Library of Parliament previously, too, and it seems all members were interested in it at that point. I did try to incorporate the context of COVID-19 within it.

I do still strongly feel that it is a current issue, just as it was seven months ago. I understand that we're currently in a pandemic, but I do think that these vulnerable populations should be looked at by this committee within the context of COVID-19, because I think this pandemic makes it all that much harder for these populations, and we should be looking at solutions and reporting on those.

At this point, seeing as how Mr. Bergeron is also agreeing to withdraw his motion, I will withdraw my motion, slightly tweak it and present it to the subcommittee in time for whatever date is decided, because I don't think that what was framed as an amendment by Mr. Chong at this point is really on the table. I think we should move to discussion, hopefully, as to when the deadline would be for all of the members to submit their proposals. I will withdraw mine.

• (1725)

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

Maybe I could ask the clerk about this. On the assumption that we may be able to pull off a Friday meeting of the subcommittee, would a deadline of Thursday be reasonable, or earlier or later on Thursday morning? What would be your advice in terms of when to put in material?

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If it is going to be Thursday, then I would ask that everything be sent to me in both official languages, because I may not have time to coordinate the translation on it as well.

The Chair: Okay.

Are there any views from members on this turnaround, or anything else that should be raised with the subcommittee as we're planning its first session?

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, in addition to what the clerk has suggested, I also suggest that we report back to this committee the results of the subcommittee's deliberations next week.

The Chair: Okay. Again, that's contingent on.... I'm very optimistic that we will be able to do that under the time frame we're facing. We may face constraints from the perspective of resources and the decisions of our whips, but your point is taken.

Are there any other views to close out this portion of the discussion?

Okay. That leaves us four minutes. I think we've had a very informative exchange.

Go ahead, Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Could I just clarify this? I might have missed it. Did we actually pass a motion inviting the two ministers to come?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I think it would be good to get done today—

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: —because it takes a while to get the ministers scheduled. It also gives the clerk and the analysts some work to do, because the agenda subcommittee may not be able to meet this Friday due to scheduling, as you've said.

If Mr. Chong would make that motion—not an amendment this time—I think we could get that piece of work done and get going on it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chong, go ahead, please.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, I move that the Minister of Foreign Affairs be invited to the committee to discuss the Main Estimates 2020-21 for 2 hours and that the Minister of International Development be invited separately to the committee to discuss the Main Estimates for two hours.

The Chair: We have a motion on the floor. It's straightforward. All members were able to hear it. Is there any debate on this motion?

Go ahead, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: I wonder if I could move to add to the main estimates with respect to the international development minister “and her mandate letter”.

The Chair: Okay. That's an amendment to the motion that Mr. Chong made.

Is there any discussion on that amendment? Do you have a comment, Mr. Oliphant?

Mr. Robert Oliphant: No, that's fine.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Could Mr. Harris repeat that? I just need clarification. I didn't hear it clearly.

Mr. Jack Harris: I'd be very happy to, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: It is to add to the consideration by the Minister of International Development the words “and her mandate letter”. The reason I add this is that we did the same for Minister Cham-

pagne back in March, as it sometimes gives a little more scope for questions. I don't know whether this chair would be as picky as some chairs. Some are very strict on these issues. Some look for a line item in the budget whenever you ask a question, and you have to play legal games to contort yourself into the right question.

If we have that opportunity with respect to Madam Gould, adding the mandate letter I think gives more scope and allows for a freer flow of discussion and questioning.

The Chair: Okay. Is there any further discussion on Mr. Harris's amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

Mr. Chong, could you briefly restate the motion as amended?

● (1730)

Hon. Michael Chong: The amended motion reads:

That the Minister of Foreign Affairs be invited to the committee to discuss the Main Estimates 2020-21 for 2 hours and that the Minister of International Development be invited separately to the committee to discuss the Main Estimates and her mandate letter for two hours.

The Chair: Okay. Is there any discussion on the main motion as amended?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

Thank you very much, Mr. Oliphant, for taking that piece of work out of our way and putting it on the agenda.

That leaves us with the exploration of the closest possible timing for a meeting of the subcommittee on procedure, the steering committee. We will come back very shortly with the timeline for your motions, ideally in both official languages. We will also come back with the timing of that subcommittee meeting.

Madam Clerk, does that meet your requirements for the moment?

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair, yes.

The Chair: Thank you so much everybody—our analysts, our interpreters, our technicians behind the scenes, all of you—and our staff who are working so hard to keep us strong. Thank you for being part of this committee. Thank you again for the confidence that you placed in me.

These are challenging times, no doubt, but there is some important and interesting work ahead of us. I look forward to working with all of you.

We will be in touch very shortly with respect to the subcommittee meeting.

Can I get a motion to adjourn?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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