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Chair: Mrs. Karen McCrimmon



Standing Committee on National Defence

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

[Translation]

Good morning and welcome, everyone.

[English]

Welcome to meeting number 24 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is in hybrid format, pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on January 25, 2021. Committee members will be present in person or through Zoom. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

[English]

I remind everyone that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair, and when speaking—and I say this more as a reminder to myself than to others—everyone should speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members whether they are participating virtually or in person.

I now recognize Madam Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I apologize to the witnesses, but before we begin, I would like to put a motion.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: My reason for putting it at the beginning of the meeting is that something very serious has occurred.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I got no English translation when you were speaking French.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Carry on, Madam Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The reason I'm putting this motion at the beginning of this meeting is that a very serious issue occurred on the weekend. I put this notice of motion, as is the common procedure, 48 hours before this meeting so that all members could review it and prepare for this meeting. On Sunday at noon, Global News reported that they had a copy of my motion, which was confidential, and reported the content of it.

The issue with this kind of leak is that it is not just about me and this motion. I believe this is about our honour as parliamentarians. The only people who had a copy of the motion are the members of this committee, which means there is a member of the committee who took a confidential motion and leaked it to the media. What that has done is not allow me as the member moving the motion to be able to provide a rationale for why I'm moving the motion, and it has also denied the members the ability to debate and discuss the motion.

I would ask at this moment that whoever on this committee did so, would own up to it and apologize to this committee as an honourable member, as a parliamentarian, with respect for this committee and this institution.

Having said that, I will move the motion, even though it has been leaked. It has been distributed in French and English. I will read it in English, but I know that the text has been distributed to all members in both languages. The motion reads:

That, concerning the study of addressing sexual misconduct issues in the Canadian Armed Forces, including the allegations against former Chief of the Defence Staff Jonathan Vance, members of the committee send their drafting instructions and recommendations for the report to the Clerk by 4:00 p.m. on Friday, April 16, 2021; that the committee complete its review of the draft report and adopt the report not later than Friday, May 28, 2021; and that the Chair table the report in the House of Commons no later than Thursday, June 10, 2021.

The reason I'm putting this motion forward is that, as we have heard from many survivors last week, including It's Just 700 that put out a statement on Twitter last Friday, the survivors, the people most impacted by military sexual trauma, have been asking that we stop pointing fingers and stop dragging the study on but make sure that their issues are heard.

We have heard in this committee very many recommendations, good recommendations, to deal with the systemic issues that led to where we are today. I consulted with the chair, the clerk and the analysts on Friday regarding timelines and realized that because of the time needed for drafting—and I'll allow the analysts and the clerk to weigh in on this if they wish—and for translation and editing and tabling a report, if we don't have the final witnesses this week, we will in all likelihood not be able to issue our recommendations before the summer recess. I would defer to the clerk if he wishes to talk about that timeline.

I believe it is very important for the witnesses who have come forward at this and other committees to ensure that these recommendations get reported to the House and are brought to the government. I believe that we owe it to the survivors to make sure that we are focused on them. They have made their voices very clear that what they're looking for is that we provide urgent recommendations so that we can take action immediately.

With regard to the study so far, I would like to point out to the committee that by my calculations, we have already spent 25 hours on the study. It could be more. I've counted 25 hours of witness testimony since February 19. Seven of those hours were with the Minister of National Defence. Within those 25 hours, we have also had 11 hours of additional extraordinary meetings that were called outside of the ordinary sitting time of this committee. We have had 21 witnesses, and as far as I can see, the only witnesses who are still remaining—there are three of them—are Mr. Jason Kenney; Mr. Gerrit Nieuwoudt, who was the chief of staff to Jason Kenney when he was the minister of defence; and Mr. Elder Marques.

• (1110)

Of all of the witnesses who have been put forward in motions, there are three left. I would also at this time ask the clerk to give us an update on those three.

I believe that it would be within our ability as a committee to invite them for Friday, in which case I think we will have exhausted the list and would be ready to ensure that we get the right recommendations to the government.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, can you answer Madam Vandenberg's question, please?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Wassim Bouanani): Madam Chair, both Mr. Marques and Mr. Nieuwoudt were not available to appear today before the committee. I have not suggested any other date.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: On point of order, Madam Chair, I believe that we also had Zita on the list and I did not hear the parliamentary secretary read out her name.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Yes. I was going on the assumption that when the minister appeared, he appeared in the name of Madam Zita Astravas. I believe that the committee could very well mention in its report, if the committee does not agree with me, that the minister appeared on her behalf. The people I mentioned are the only three who have not been dealt with by the committee so far.

The Chair: Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I too am disappointed that this was in the media. Regardless, the issue is that there are still a number of witnesses we have not heard from. We do have witnesses sitting at the table right now, so I move that we table this motion until the end of the meeting, for debate.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. James Bezan: I just moved a motion.

That's dilatory.

The Chair: There's already a motion on the floor right now, Mr. Bezan, so stand by.

Mr. James Bezan: I'm moving a motion to table debate.

The Chair: Mr. Bezan, are you asking to adjourn the debate?

Mr. James Bezan: Yes. Let's adjourn debate until the end of the meeting.

The Chair: Okay.

The Clerk: The question is on the motion to adjourn the debate.

The Chair: Stand by. I think we're getting confused here.

Let me clarify. What we're asking for now is whether you want to adjourn the debate at this time.

• (1115)

Mr. James Bezan: On a point of order, we had started a vote, and why are we not continuing with it?

The Chair: I just wanted to make sure that everyone understood the qualifiers and conditions on this.

The vote right now is whether we, at the present time, adjourn the debate and then bring the debate on this motion forward up for a vote later in the meeting. That's my understanding and that's what I think needed to be clear.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: On a point of order, just to be clear, I believe what Mr. Bezan said is that we would continue. We would table the motion until just before the end of the meeting and deal with it then, and not to go right to a vote.

The Chair: That's exactly what I wanted clarified.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: All right, so we're not going right to a vote afterwards. We're going to continue the debate on the motion?

The Chair: That's correct. This is why it has to be clear.

The Clerk: If I may add, if the motion is adopted, we will move on to the next item on the agenda.

The Chair: That being the witnesses.

Can we carry on with the vote, please?

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

Go ahead, Madam Vandenberg.

• (1120)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I call the question on my motion.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. James Bezan: Who do you have? I think Randall's up.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: No, Randall had his hand up before I did.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Garrison. I did call on you earlier, but you must not have heard me.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you very much. We are having some slight delays this morning electronically, so I did not hear you call on me.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to start by saying that I am as concerned, if not more concerned, than Madam Vandenbeld about the leak of this motion before the committee, but I want to say that I don't believe that casting aspersions on any particular members here is a useful way of investigating such leaks, and of course, those who are opposed to this motion—which I am—would have no interest in leaking the motion, because then we couldn't comment on it over the weekend.

Turning to the substance of the motion, I think it is premature to end the study before we've heard from key witnesses. I have heard Madam Vandenbeld say that the victims are demanding an end to this study. I have heard no such thing from any victims' organizations. What they're asking for is action to confront sexual misconduct in the military, and the subject of this study is not the general topic of the policies to combat sexual misconduct in the military.

The subject of this study is why nothing was done at the highest level when allegations of sexual misconduct were raised against a sitting chief of the defence staff, who was allowed to serve for an additional three years without any action being taken, without any investigation, and who, in fact, of course, was given a pay raise, which indicates a judgment of satisfactory performance.

This is the topic of our study, because we need assurances that those at the highest level in the military both understand what sexual misconduct is and are prepared to take action against even the most senior officers in the military when sexual conduct is involved. That is crucial to any measures [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] sexual misconduct in the military.

We've certainly heard in testimony, and I've heard many times from those who talked about the failure of Operation Honour to confront sexual misconduct because it appeared to set up two different standards, whereunder rank-and-file members of the military were subject to one code of conduct and one response to sexual misconduct while senior officers seemed to be exempt from those measures.

What we're trying to do is give confidence to Canadian women that they can serve equally in the Canadian military, and that confidence comes only when they know that these issues will be taken seriously at the very highest level. When Madam Vandenbeld talks about the hours of testimony we've heard, I absolutely agree with her. We've heard lots of testimony. We've heard lots from the minister. We have heard no one take responsibility for the fact that the chief of defence staff continued to serve for an additional three years, let alone apologize for that fact.

We have had no one take responsibility for the fact that the allegation against him, for which the military ombudsman clearly

found evidence, was ever investigated. Once again, no one has taken responsibility, and no one has apologized for the failure to follow up on that investigation. We heard many lectures by members of the Liberal party about ministerial responsibility, and clearly, in the Westminster system, as we heard from Mr. Wernick and as is obvious, there's always a minister responsible.

Until we get to the bottom of who knew what and when of the minister and the Prime Minister, we have not concluded this study, and we still have additional witnesses to hear.

For those reasons, I believe it is premature to proceed to shut down this debate and submit recommendations for consideration by the committee, and I will be voting against this motion.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

• (1125)

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Chair, I think Mr. Garrison put it very eloquently.

There are still people we need to hear from and there is no confirmation that they're going to be here by Friday. I'd hate to see our having one Friday meeting with four or five witnesses sitting at the end of the table. This just speaks to the higher issue here of the Liberals trying to shut down debate. They're trying to extend the cover-up that happened three years ago in the Department of National Defence under the watch of Minister Sajjan, and under the watch of the Prime Minister through his subordinates in the Prime Minister's Office. Here we are with the Liberals now trying to shut down a committee investigation into what happened.

As Mr. Garrison just said, we need to know who knew what, and when they knew it and why they didn't act upon it. We still haven't seen that come forward in any of the testimony that's been presented by the minister himself.

I was extremely disappointed with the minister's appearance last week where he failed to show any contrition. He did not take responsibility for what happened back in 2018. When you contrast that with Michael Wernick, who was very clearly upset that, as he said, he had "lost sight of the misconduct issues" against General Vance.

Therefore, we need to continue to drill down on the intel here. For the Liberals to try to shut this down in an expeditious manner flies in the face of our responsibilities as parliamentarians to carry on with this investigation. Here, again, they'd rather have our having this debate on committee matters when we have witnesses sitting at the table who want to share with our committee their knowledge on this issue.

I am just so disappointed. The Liberals like to talk about being a feminist government. Well, guess what? That's all phoney and hyperbole, and it's not at all about the reality of what the women in the Canadian Armed Forces are facing.

Let's stand up for those victims right now. Let's make sure we continue to get the information that they want to see happen. Just as Mr. Garrison said, I haven't had anyone write to me and say that it's time to shut down this study. You guys are [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] any results. I can tell you that the only way we can get the results is when we get to the truth. I have more members of the Canadian Armed Forces and more and more veterans who are reaching out and telling us to go further and get more information so that they can know what happened.

This is about restoring trust: trust in the leadership of senior commanders within the Canadian Armed Forces, and trust in the department leadership as well, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence. Right now that trust is broken, and this is our chance to repair some of that damage by holding those responsible to account.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

This may be a point of order, but could you tell me what we're debating right now? I thought I had understood that you had to make a decision following the last vote, because there was a desire to hear the witnesses right away and to debate the motions at the end, but perhaps I misunderstood. I had understood that, in the event of a tie vote, you had to make a decision as chair. I understand that we are debating Mr. Bezan's motion rather than hearing the witnesses.

So I need some clarification to understand where we are and what I didn't understand in the process.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, and that's the challenge of having these kinds of motions going back and forth, and that's why I wanted to be perfectly clear with the clerk about what we were actually voting on.

As we mentioned earlier, with regard to the motion to adjourn the debate, we are now instead going to vote on Madam Vandenbeld's motion, because the—

Mr. Randall Garrison: No, no.

The Chair: —because the—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Stand by.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: That's not the motion that is before us right now.

The Chair: Stand by.

Yes, it is because the motion to adjourn the debate failed. It did not pass, so the motion that was brought to the floor by Madam Vandenbeld at the beginning of the meeting is the motion that is standing and being voted upon.

Now, go ahead and take the division, please.

Mr. James Bezan: On a point of order, Madam Chair, you have hands up and you can't call a vote when there are still people who want to speak. You don't have that.... You have three hands up on the screen.

The Chair: When I called the vote, there were no hands up.

Mr. Randall Garrison: You cannot call the vote.

An hon. member: You cannot.

The Chair: There were no hands up when I called the vote.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): My hand was up.

Mr. Randall Garrison: You cannot call the vote as long as there are speakers.

We'll have chaos here until you agree to hear speakers. We will continue to disrupt this committee until you adhere to the rules.

You must adhere to the rules or adjourn the committee at this point. There is no alternative. You may not proceed against the rules of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I had my hand up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Madam Chair, I'd like to go back to your decision.

To my knowledge, it isn't possible for the chair to cut off debate and announce a vote directly, without there being any debate.

[*English*]

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I believe the chair is suspending to confer with the clerk.

I also didn't see any hands up in front of me when the chair said that we were going to the vote. I think that's why she said—

An hon. member: I raised my hand.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Maybe there was a technical thing.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Maybe the chair can officially suspend, then, if that's what she has done.

The Chair: We will suspend to confer with the clerk.

• (1135)

(Pause)

• (1135)

The Chair: All right. Stand by—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: On a point of order, Madam Chair—

The Chair: —stand by, stand by.

When I called the vote, there were no hands up. I assure you there were no hands up.

Now it looks as though there are people who wish to debate. I get it. If people want to do this, then we can go ahead with the debate, and we're good with that.

However, I will assure you that when I called for the vote, there were no hands up. If there was a technical glitch and there was a delay, that's fine. These are the challenges of working in a hybrid system, but we can make it work.

Those who want to—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I have a point of order, ma'am.

You can't see over the box in front of you. My hand was up also.

More to the point, I asked you specifically, after we went to Mr. Bezan's motion, if that meant we were going directly to a vote on Ms. Vandenberg's motion, and you said, no, that we were going to debate it instead.

The Chair: Here's the challenge.

This is the time to debate. I get that, and we'll allow that to happen. It's really important that we do this.

I'll go ahead.

The last one up was Monsieur Barsalou-Duval.

I want to see whether your question was answered, Mr. Barsalou-Duval, or whether there is more that you would like to bring forward at this point in the debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: My question has been answered, Madam Chair. I'd like to add something, but I think I raised my hand after my question was answered. So I'll let the next person go, and I'll wait my turn.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I do have to say I think it's incumbent on the chair to make sure that there are no people waiting to speak before moving to a vote. I say that with all respect. We are dealing with virtual parliaments, which do sometimes have electronic delays. I accept that it may have been the case.

In any case, returning to the substance of this motion, we heard the parliamentary secretary tell us that there is no way that we can return a report to the House of Commons before the summer adjournment if we don't finish this by Friday. I know that she has leaned on her interpretation of the clerk's remarks, and I don't wish to draw the clerk into a debate about this, but it's very clear that it's not the case, and that the committee would have the ability to continue to hear the witnesses we need to hear and then to have a session for giving instructions to the drafters and then have, obviously, an in camera session of full debate on what this committee is going to recommend to the House.

We are dealing, I think, with one of the most important concepts that have ever been dealt with while I've been on the defence committee, and that is the trust that serving members have in the senior leadership of the military. We, as Mr. Bezan pointed out, must get to the bottom of these questions in order to try to restore that trust. That trust also extends to the Minister of National Defence and indeed to the Prime Minister.

What we as the opposition are trying to do is to make sure that we get the evidence we need to restore that trust. That's why what I believe are quite direct attempts today to cut off debate are inappropriate and do not serve the serving members of the Canadian Forces well.

● (1140)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I've asked the clerk whether he feels comfortable talking to this, but he actually suggested that we ask our analysts, because it's the analysts who will oversee, really, the writing and the translation of the report and the drafts and things.

So would our lead analyst like to comment on the suggested schedule and the development of that schedule?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I would like clarification regarding Ms. Vandenberg's motion. If it passes, does that mean the witnesses who are appearing before us today will not appear and that she's cutting off our having any further meetings that include having witnesses, or does it include cutting it off at witnesses who were about to be scheduled and going to the report stage?

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: My motion simply states that we need to send our recommendations and drafting instructions by Friday at 4 p.m. That does not mean that today's witnesses or even Friday's witnesses would not be heard. It just means that we would have to have those instructions by 4 p.m. Given my understanding of the back and forth with the analysts, the clerk and the chair, if we don't do that, the timeline would be such that we might not be able to have a report before the summer recess.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: If I may respond, if I understand you correctly, Ms. Vandenberg, as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Defence, you are going back and forth with the chair of this committee, which is supposed to be implementing oversight and looking into the Minister of Defence being part of the chain of command and looking at whether or not things were done accordingly. It seems like a bit of a conflict there when the very department we're supposed to be having oversight over is being directed by the chair on how to proceed.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Gallant.

Go ahead, Madam Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I'd like to respond to that. I put a notice of motion and I received correspondence back from the clerk that, having discussed it with the analysts, he recommended changes to my motion. I had a more ambitious timeline actually. I had suggested having it earlier. He came back with recommendations to me to change the motion because that timeline was unrealistic.

I then agreed with the clerk's recommendation and put a second motion, which was then distributed to the members and leaked to the media.

The Chair: Thank you.

The clerk would like to add comments.

Go ahead, please.

The Clerk: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to say that the information that was provided was based on the time that needs to be allocated to each of the steps that precede the adoption of a report in committee and the tabling of the report in the House before the House adjournment in June. It takes into account time for submission of instructions and recommendations from members, drafting, proofing, translation, formatting for version one and the subsequent revised version, and finally for any complementary or dissenting reports.

The Chair: Okay. I'm afraid other people are....

Ms. Cheryl Gallant: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Madam Alleslev.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

This is highly disconcerting.

First of all, I think we need to put it on the record that there are still nine and a half weeks left before the summer recess. We have in the past, on other committees and on this committee, been able to have drafting instructions, write a report, complete it, submit it and table it in the House in significantly less time than that. My concern is that this is offering an unjustified pressure of timeline when one doesn't actually exist.

Second of all, the fact that the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Defence has brought this forward is also somewhat disconcerting. She is a representative of the executive branch. The responsibility of the House of Commons standing committee is to, in part, hold the executive branch accountable. In something as serious as this, we need to have not only in reality no interference from the executive branch, but we need even more so to have no possible perception of interference by the executive branch.

We are talking about the trust and confidence of Canadian Forces personnel and of Canadians in the whole structure of the National Defence Act and in our elected representative who is responsible for the Department of National Defence and the military—the Minister of Defence.

Once that trust and confidence have been lost, and with any possible perception that the executive branch is interfering in our ability to get to the bottom of it, then the very institutions of a military and our democratic structure are strongly at risk. I wanted to make sure that I put that forward.

Third, I have no one who has asked to conclude this study. In fact, I have been overwhelmed by the number of emails, phone calls and texts to my office and to me personally that are providing additional information, support and feedback on just how critical

this study is and just how overdue it is. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] incident that has simply arisen recently. It is not a one-off. It is, unfortunately—the more we do the study—a systematic pattern of behaviour at the very highest levels, possibly even including the Privy Council, the Prime Minister's Office, the Prime Minister himself and the Minister of National Defence.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*] people do not feel that we have got to the bottom of this and have done our legislative responsibility as elected representatives of Canadians to figure out exactly how this went wrong and what needs to be done to re-establish the trust and confidence in the Canadian Armed Forces.

We still have no answer on why a CDS with outstanding unresolved allegations of sexual misconduct was allowed to continue in his position for an additional three years. The fact that there was any possibility that those allegations were true and that no one—not at the highest level—determined the need to investigate or get to the bottom of it and ensure that they weren't true is highly disconcerting. Also, we still have no accountability from the minister or anyone else that it was in fact their responsibility to ensure that a chief of the defence staff or any senior military personnel were allowed to continue with unresolved allegations of any kind, not the least of which is abuse of power or sexual misconduct.

Last, but just as important, how are we going to ensure that the process continues after our study is complete and that those people who are complicit, either through their silence or through their actions, are held accountable?

● (1145)

I ask that because this is not only about fixing processes and procedures. It's not only about holding accountable those who should have done something. It's also about ensuring that those who may have done things that were not honourable and beyond reproach are held accountable in the future.

There is still a significant amount of serious inquiry that we, as elected representatives, must look into and that's why we cannot, must not stop now. We owe it to the citizens and the members of the Canadian Forces. I was a woman in the military and I did not feel that I was able to serve equally in some circumstances, and that was over 30 years ago. This is our time to do something about it. We can't afford not to. This study is a critical piece in moving forward the country and the Canadian Armed Forces.

Thank you.

● (1150)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I heard the comments from my colleagues in the Conservative Party and the NDP, and I have to say that I agree with them for the most part, especially when they say that they feel frustrated that they don't know the substance of the case and that they don't really know what the [*technical difficulties*] were in terms of the responsibilities for the decisions that were made, or rather decisions that weren't made, regarding the status of the witnesses who were called by the committee and that the government refuses to allow to appear. All these things are very worrisome, but we must also think about the victims. The committee must be able to report on the situation so that the government and decision-makers take these victims into account so that they know that they've ultimately been heard.

We all know that the government is dreaming of calling an election. If we don't manage to complete the report by the end of June, there most likely won't ever be one. I think it would be a shame to lose such an opportunity to report on the committee's work, both for victims and for those who are disappointed by the government's actions in terms of its sort of willingness to prevent witnesses from appearing before the committee.

Steps have also been taken by the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics regarding an outstanding order of reference. I think that will continue.

So I intend to support the motion.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Bezan, please.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is disappointing that the Liberals are bringing forward this motion as part of an ongoing cover-up of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces by the highest ranking officers, particularly by the two chiefs of the defence staff. It's more about protecting themselves as Liberals than protecting the brave women who serve us in uniform.

I've been on this committee now for 10 years and a parliamentarian for much longer, and I've never seen a report take this long to draft, with over a two-month time frame that has been proposed. I've seen us do reports quickly and easily in a matter of days, and I've also seen very substantive reports get done in less than a month, so I think that if we want to buckle down we can get that report done. I do want to have a report.

Let's keep in mind that the status of women committee is also doing its own study into sexual misconduct, so we can continue to drive forward on looking at who knew what and when and why they did or did not take any action and allow the other committee, the status of women committee, to do the more substantive work on how we support the victims and how we can change things like the culture within the Canadian Armed Forces. I think that is where we need to make sure that we don't cross wires but try to collaborate as much as possible, including looking at testimony that's been provided to the status of women committee and how we may want to utilize that in our own report here.

It's interesting to note that when we look at the witnesses who have appeared, virtually all of the witnesses invited by the Liberal members of the committee have already showed up, yet when we look at whom we've asked for on our side of the table, we still haven't had Zita Astravas, despite moving a number of motions at this committee, as well as in the House of Commons, asking her to appear. Instead, the last time, we got Minister Sajjan. Then there's Elder Marques, who was a senior adviser to Prime Minister Trudeau. We've asked him to appear and he still hasn't showed up. This is why I think the Liberals are trying to shut down this study. They don't want him to appear, because he is a person who can connect the dots about who knew what within Minister Sajjan's office and who knew what within the Prime Minister's Office.

Of course, Michael Wernick, being the former clerk of the Privy Council, wasn't party to the conversations that he said took place on the second floor of the Prime Minister's Office. This is something that we need to keep in mind and to hear from these witnesses if we want to get down to the bottom of why this ball was dropped, especially in relation to General Vance. What was known three years ago and why wasn't it acted upon? Why wasn't he removed, at the very least, as the senior commander of Operation Honour? It undermined all the work that took place trying to stomp out sexual misconduct, and as we found out, it didn't at all address sexual misconduct by the very highest commanders within the Canadian Armed Forces, who are now facing multiple allegations. There are multiple leaders within the Canadian Armed Forces who are implicated. We need to hear from both present and past political staffers within the upper Liberal echelon to come forward to talk about what happened.

The other thing that we haven't been able to drill down on is the minister continuing claim that he couldn't do anything because that would have been considered political interference. We've heard from military justice experts like retired Colonel Michel Drapeau and retired justice Létourneau, who have said publicly that it's not political interference to ask for an investigation or to accept evidence and then pass it on to the appropriate people. We also saw in the news last week that the current commander of the Canadian Forces national investigation service said that it's not political interference to ask CFNIS to do an investigation. It would only be political interference if the minister tried to direct the particulars about the investigation as to tampering with evidence, or telling them that they can't talk to so and so, or that this or that is the outcome he wanted. If it's to look into allegations, that is not considered political interference. A case in point is the Prime Minister and his office directing the investigations into Vice-Admiral Mark Norman. Those investigations were definitely done at the highest levels of the Liberal government, and yet that's not considered political interference.

• (1155)

It comes back to the trust within the Canadian Armed Forces. The trust in Minister Sajjan and in Prime Minister Trudeau has been completely eroded because of these allegations, and it is our responsibility to investigate this as far as we can and start rebuilding that trust. The way we can rebuild that trust is if we can clearly document at every step of the way how that trust broke down, going right back to evidence being presented to Minister Sajjan on March 1, 2018.

Madam Chair, we need to do a lot more work here, and I still have full confidence that at the end of the day, we can call in probably another four to six witnesses, especially if we have witnesses who provide us with more information that require us to ask [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to appear before committee as we continue to connect the dots and still get to a final report before the House recesses.

I know that in nine and a half weeks we can find the time, including during a break week and during other meeting times within the parliamentary calendar, to get this work done, because this is the most important work we are undertaking in this session. We haven't seen anything rattle the Canadian Armed Forces to this degree since the Somalia inquiry. It's been a generation since then. We need to look at how we can take all that we have learned here and move forward with proper recommendations that the government can act on.

The other thing we always have to keep in mind, and we know that based upon the [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. In reality, we may not make it to the end of June anyway because Parliament could be prorogued and an election could be under way, so I put that out there as well, that it will be very difficult to get to a final report with a spring election.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Chair, Ms. Alleslev eloquently and very completely described what I was going to say. It is the work of this committee to continue, not to simply cast off to an inquiry, which will get lost and slammed down like the Somalia affair, just when we're getting to the nub of the problem. Therefore, I would like this motion to either be withdrawn or set aside until we have the opportunity to hear from all the witnesses who are germane to this study.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Benzen.

Mr. Bob Benzen (Calgary Heritage, CPC): This is my first year on the committee, but it seems from what I've heard that this is one of the most important studies that's happened in a very long time. If that is indeed the case, it is very important that we continue to get all of the information possible to get so that when we do our report, it will be complete. Ending it early makes no sense if it's such an important study.

Clearly, we don't have all the information at this point. There is a lot of time left. We've heard a lot of other issues mentioned about it maybe not even mattering because an election will be called, but

our duty is not to worry about when an election is going to be called. Our duty is to get the information and do a thorough report.

We know there are more witnesses to be called. It is premature at this point to not have them come in. We need to have them appear. We can all work more time on this project. The analysts can work longer hours if this is important. I know nobody wants to hear that, but the fact of the matter is this is a job we are doing for our Canadian Armed Forces, for Canada.

We can't just say that we only have so much time left and that we're just going to work our normal hours, and that's it. This is important. Let's do the right thing. Let's work as much as we have to on this. Clearly, more questions have to be asked, and something that is really frustrating to me is that we have wasted a lot of time in these discussions.

This morning we Conservatives have been talking, but we've had three or four meetings where the Liberals have done what they are doing today, where we have wasted, two, three or four hours when we could have had witnesses coming in and been asking them the questions instead of debating among ourselves.

I don't think this committee should be partisan in the way it is right now. We should be non-partisan. We should be looking for the truth. Canadian want to hear the truth. I don't think we're doing that by trying to stop things from happening and delaying people from coming in. Certainly what we saw with the ministers speaking for their staff, there seemed to be another diversion there.

I think we need to keep going. We should set this motion aside. We should put in another couple of weeks on this for sure, and then once we feel we have all of the information, that's when we should stop and start writing the report.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

I really want to respond to a couple of issues that have been raised by my opposition colleagues, because I think they're important to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

First of all, I think it's really important to note what some of the opposition members have indicated, namely, that they're not hearing members of the forces or survivors of sexual harassment and assault say they want a report to be written and finalized as soon as possible. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] provide support for that, and I would turn the member's attention to the group called It's Just 700. I'll read from their Twitter bio, which says it's "Run by a group of volunteers dedicated to help current and past service members of the Canadian military who survived a work related sexual trauma find support." They have a website and you can look up more information if you are interested.

I'll just read a couple of comments they made recently, on April 9, on their Twitter feed: "After yesterday's testimony at the HofC standing committee on the Status of Women the survivor community eagerly awaits the release of the final report and official recommendations." I want to keep reading: "It'sJust700 does not endorse ANY political party. The needs of affected servicemen and service-women don't change with who is or isn't in power."

• (1205)

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Chair, on point of order, his video is very choppy.

The Chair: Can you please start again, Mr. Baker. You did get interrupted there.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Okay. Can you hear me now, Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I wanted to address some of the comments that were made by my opposition colleagues, which I think were incorrect and unfair.

There are a couple of items I want to address. First is the comment made by some opposition colleagues that [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] hearing from members of the armed forces and victims of sexual harassment and assault. They are eagerly awaiting the release of our committee's report. They'd like us to complete that report urgently.

I want to point the members' attention to a group called It's Just 700. There's a website where there's more information available, but I quote here from the bio of their Twitter feed. It's "Run by a group of volunteers dedicated...past service members of the Canadian military who survived a work related sexual trauma find support." I have personally had the opportunity to hear from some of the members of this organization as well.

I want to quote from a couple of their recent comments. They're from Twitter, so they're available publicly. They state, "ItsJust700 does not endorse ANY political party. The needs of affected servicemen and servicewomen don't change with who is or isn't in power. Lately, it feels like our community is being exploited by media and politicians for trauma porn click-bait and political leverage."

I want to point you to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] "for those consultations to BECOME meaningful, informative and useful. We want them to BE used. We've been talking for 5-6 years. It's time for action now."

They also comment that "Delaying the release of the Status of Women report, including the recommendations that can be implemented immediately, will not serve survivors' best interests. We need help yesterday."

Another comment is that "Culture change in the CAF will need to include systemic changes to the selection, training, health care, performance review, family support services, and realigning the CAFs core values with the progressive values held by Canadians in order to recover from this crisis."

There are other comments along these lines, but the point I'm simply trying to make is to underline that there are many survivors—many victims—out there who are asking us to move forward. I know someone's going to say that they were referring to the status of women committee and this is the defence committee. I hear that, but they eagerly await the release of reports that will allow us to address this problem. I think it's fair to understand that they're eager for us, as a committee, to make recommendations that allow government to take action and to end the politics, which they've also criticized.

I would also add on that point that I have heard from members of that group personally that they are eager to have us deliver a report as soon as possible.

As far as the other point I wanted to make, there were a couple of members who, in my view, impugned the credibility of the clerk in suggesting the timelines the clerk offered are not correct and not consistent with past practice. One of the members [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] not have been in contact with the clerk. My understanding is that it's common practice for members of the committee, if need be, to consult with the clerk.

Ms. Vandenbeld is a parliamentary secretary. She's also a member of Parliament who was elected. She has the opportunity to consult with the clerk, just like I do and any other member of this committee does. That's what she did. In crafting the motion, her goal was to achieve the objective of completing this report before the end of this spring session. That's my impression anyway. She needed to consult with the clerk to figure out what timelines we would have to meet as a committee to meet that timeline. I think it's very reasonable and there's nothing inappropriate about that consultation.

There were also comments that impugned the credibility of the clerk. I think that's unfair. The clerk has been asked for input on timelines, which is completely reasonable. It's very common. Members of all parties do this on a regular basis. I just wanted to defend the good name of the clerk in this context because I thought some of the comments were unfair.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bezan, please.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just wanted to follow up on Mr. Baker's comments on It's Just 700.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I have a point of privilege.

The Chair: Stand by. I gave the floor to Mr. Bezan.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: A point of privilege has precedence over all other motions.

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Madam Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Ms. Vandenbeld said that only members had received her motion, but that's not true. Everyone, from members' main accounts, assistants and a librarian were copied on the motion.

I would invite her to withdraw her accusation against fellow honourable members.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: If you'll recall, I said "members", and by that, I meant that members and their staff were the only ones who received this motion.

Frankly, all I did was ask for the person, whoever it was who leaked this to the media, to please own up to it and make an apology to this committee. That's all that I've asked for.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. James Bezan: I had the floor before that—

The Chair: I think you did, but your hand went down, so I thought you were finished.

Go ahead, Mr. Bezan, then after that, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. James Bezan: I was just trying to make sure I wasn't called after I spoke.

In reply to Mr. Baker's comments, many of us [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] members of It's Just 700. I can tell you that what they want is the truth. That one tweet that he read was about the work of the Status of Women committee and that they look forward to the report. I'm sure they want to see both reports, and they don't want us to cut off work prematurely, and that's what this motion does.

It's shutting down this study. Again, it feeds into the narrative—and I'm not sure why the Liberals would want to feed the narrative—that they're trying to cover up sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces and that they're more interested in protecting the political skin of the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence than protecting the women who serve us in uniform.

Let's continue to make sure that we have all of the witnesses we need to hear from and still put in place conditions that we can have a report in place before this House recesses for the summer at the latest.

Speaking from my experience, it's not about impugning the reputation of the clerk in any way, shape, or form; it's just that we've been able to accomplish this work in the past under very tight timelines, and I know that we can do that again.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I, too, just want to state very clearly that no one's impugning the reputation or abilities of the clerk. What we're disputing is the inter-

pretation of the advice given by the clerk on what is possible and what is not possible.

I also want to say that I don't think it's useful in our debate today, which is about whether we're getting to the truth and whether we're getting all of the evidence, to try to cite outside sources saying what we should or should not do. It is our responsibility as a committee to find the evidence we need to find.

I will say quite frankly that, if I believed that Elder Marques was appearing on Friday and that he had been invited and was confirmed, I wouldn't think this motion was so premature.

What we had is a phenomenon—it's the first time I've seen it in my 10 years in Parliament—where the Minister of Defence referred us to staff. Rather than take responsibility for it himself, he said that his staff told the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister's Office did this and the Privy Council Office did that. The reason we are asking to hear from these staff is that we were referred to them by a minister who, instead of taking responsibility, has tried to pass it off to staff.

I have drawn no conclusions about what the Prime Minister knew or when he knew it. I believe he has said publicly that he knew there were accusations but not the details. The testimony of Elder Marques is quite crucial to finding out what exactly the Prime Minister was told and when he was given that information.

We know from the former military ombudsman that he had evidence that substantiated a complaint. I don't know if that information was passed along to the Prime Minister or not. I don't know that at this point because the Minister of Defence said his staff had taken care of this, and the Prime Minister's staff had taken care of that.

If we had confirmation that Elder Marques was coming and could tell us what the Prime Minister knew and when he knew it, then we might be close to coming to a conclusion of these hearings, in my opinion. Then we would know who should have taken responsibility for the failure to investigate, and we would know who should have taken responsibility for the fact that General Vance continued to serve for three years under this [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and know who's responsible, really, for the failure of Operation Honour because of the activities of very senior officers in the Canadian military.

If we had that confirmation, then I wouldn't regard this motion as so premature, but we don't have that confirmation. We don't know when he's going to appear.

There is other important work of the committee that is still on the table. We have draft reports on mental health in the military, and we have a draft report on the impact of COVID on the military. I would like to see us deal with those.

If these witnesses aren't prepared to appear on Friday or can't appear on Friday, there's other work that we can continue to do until these witnesses appear before the committee. Then we can finally find out who was responsible for this failure to investigate and the failure to remove General Vance.

Thank you.

• (1215)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Garrison. I agree with him that there is other work here. There are two draft reports that are important that we need to get to.

I've always said, Madam Chair, that you can use your flexibility in your position to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. If we don't have witnesses available, then we can go on to other studies, including finishing off these draft reports.

After we get through this study, the next study that we're undertaking—which you've already provided the terms of reference—is on a review of the military justice system. The one thing we have learned through this process is that the highest commanders in the country are immune, it seems, to the military justice system, including court martial. Who gets to do the court martial when the chiefs of the defence staff themselves are implicated?

Here's another study that we need to dive into that dovetails beautifully...and will provide I think some very good clarity as to what types of changes need to be made to the military justice system, both code of service discipline as well as the National Defence Act. As we move forward, we need to make sure we address that in the next study, and I hope we can get to that in relatively short order.

I want to assure members of the committee, especially our Liberal counterparts, that we aren't here trying to rag the puck. We aren't trying to delay the study. We just want to get down to the last few witnesses. We know who they are, and as I said, it's Zita Astravas and Elder Marques. Once we hear from them, I think we'll be in pretty good shape to be able to start moving forward and drafting the report for the study.

Elder Marques may perhaps suggest other witnesses. We may want to bring in one expert to talk about things like political interference and how far the minister can go in accepting things like evidence and providing direction to the CFNIS or to boards of inquiry or to outside sources when required, because it might involve things and people like the chief of the defence staff.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much, MP Bezan.

To our witnesses, I must apologize to you. You're getting a first-hand view of what happens in parliamentary committees. We ask you to stay with us a little bit longer, because we know what you have to offer the committee today is very important.

I have to go now to Madam Alleslev, please.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to continue a bit with what my colleague, Mr. Bezan, was saying. There's a very big difference between delaying a study unnecessarily, and ensuring that a study addresses the critical questions brought to us to review. We are trying to ensure that we do a thorough and responsible job, and that we get the critical evidence that we require in order to answer the very fundamental questions that have been put before us.

As we said, this is not about delaying; it is about ensuring that we do a responsible job [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. That is our responsibility.

To that end, we can't say what additional information we will require when we hear from critical witnesses. To Mr. Garrison's point, when the minister came, he said, "I gave it to my chief of staff and she went and spoke to people". That's why we've called Zita Astravas to provide us with that information.

If we had received all of the information from the minister, we wouldn't have had to call Zita. We haven't heard from these remaining critical witnesses yet, so we don't know if they're going to tell us another piece of the puzzle that we absolutely need to review in order to do the job we need to do.

To the point that Mr. Bezan made about the military justice system, not only have we seen something incredibly disturbing, that we have senior military people who appear to be immune from the justice system, but we also have been given testimony that says the possibility exists for senior military personnel to interfere in the military justice system. That is even more egregious. Not only does it seem like there are two different approaches, but senior military personnel are actually able to interfere in the process to protect themselves.

If we have entrusted these senior military officers with such great responsibility, not only have we asked all serving members to protect and defend Canadian values at home but we've also asked them to go to other countries to defend and protect these values that the world wants to have. If they can't do that within our own organization, within the military itself, then we can't hope to be a model to honour and defend those values outside of the country.

We absolutely need to get to the bottom of this, because this is the tipping point for our Canadian Armed Forces. We as parliamentarians, at the moment, appear to be the last line of defence of being able to push this forward and have some of these really critical issues reviewed and explored.

• (1220)

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

Seeing no hands up, I'm going to ask the clerk to proceed with the vote.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

We will now continue with our witnesses for today.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, February 9, the committee is resuming its study addressing sexual misconduct issues in the Canadian Armed Forces, including the allegations against former Chief of the Defence Staff Jonathan Vance.

With us today by video conference—

• (1225)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Madam Chair, if I could, I'd like to move a motion. We have only half an hour left of this meeting, and this is a critical witness. I would like to move a motion that he come back another day so that we could hear his testimony and deal with the matter in its fullness.

Half an hour doesn't do justice to being able to hear from this witness.

The Chair: The clerk says that we do have one more meeting on Friday. Perhaps I can ask the clerk to reach out to these witnesses to see if they can come on Friday.

Is that acceptable, Madam Alleslev?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Well, we need to hear from them, so if it's not Friday, then it needs to be a day when it does work for them. Obviously, they're helping us with this—

The Chair: We do have them today, so we can ask to go longer [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I don't believe we can, Madam Chair. Half an hour versus two hours is not the same. We need to be able to do this justice.

The Chair: To our witnesses, could I ask whether you might be able to stay with us today until maybe 1:30 p.m., let's say, or two o'clock? If you could also make yourselves available on Friday, that would also be an option.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: But, Madam Chair, we don't necessarily have the ability to stay longer. We need to be able to address the witnesses, because we have obviously done the preparation in this regard.

Please, this is a very important inquiry. We need to have the time to do it justice. I'm looking for your support in this matter.

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean, are you available for another hour?

[*English*]

Rear-Admiral Patterson, I would ask you the same question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Jean (Deputy Minister Ret'd , As an Individual): I can stay until 2:00 p.m. or 2:30 p.m. today. Later than that would be problematic.

I would be free on Friday.

[*English*]

The Chair: Rear-Admiral Patterson.

Rear-Admiral Rebecca Patterson (Commander, Canadian Forces Health Services, Defence Champion for Women, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will have to confirm for Friday. I'm not sure of my schedule yet. I have a little bit longer. I do not believe I'm available to 14:00 today.

The Chair: Okay. When you have to leave, please let me know.

Let's at least take advantage of our two witnesses for as long as they are available. It looks as though both of them are available to us for a little while. Let's take advantage of that. We can work with the clerk and see what we can make happen for Friday.

Go ahead, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: I do not have time available to extend. I have three other meetings right after this, so I would support Ms. Alleslev's position.

As a compromise, I would suggest that we hear the testimony. All of them can put their testimony on the record. Then we can have them come back at a later time, if it's this Friday...but we still need to hear from Elder Marques. I would hope that he would also be available for Friday's meeting, knowing that we just passed a motion that Friday will be our last time to hear from witnesses.

I would suggest that we have testimony from Mr. Jean and Admiral Patterson right now and that we have Qs and As at the Friday meeting along with testimony and an appearance by Elder Marques.

• (1230)

The Chair: All right.

Let us take advantage of the witnesses. We have kept them waiting long enough. If they're willing to stay with us for another hour, I think we ought to take advantage of that. We can discuss Friday's schedule separately. I am happy to do that.

Only Mr. Jean has an opening statement. The rear admiral just has a few opening remarks. That should at least give us an hour to an hour and a half of testimony from our witnesses today. Since they have been so generous and forgiving to stick with us through the debate of the last hour and a half, I think it's only fair that we give them the opportunity to respond to questions here in committee.

I am going to open with Monsieur Daniel Jean, former national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister; followed by Rear Admiral Rebecca Patterson, commander, Canadian Forces health services, and defence champion for women.

Welcome, both of you.

I invite you, Mr. Jean, to make your opening statement, and then that will be followed by a few opening words from Rear Admiral Patterson. Go ahead, Mr. Jean, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Jean: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the committee's work on this important matter. I have had the privilege to serve this country at home and abroad for more than 35 years. This has provided me the opportunity to work closely with national security organizations like the Canadian Armed Forces both internationally and domestically.

It is obviously a very challenging time for the Canadian Forces, particularly for women. As your work proceeds to identify pathways to address these challenges, I would be remiss if I did not underline how much I have been impressed by the dedication and work of its members. Now as a private but interested citizen, I can only hope that the institution can build on its rich tradition to nurture an environment where female members can express their talent without fear of harassment or inappropriate behaviours.

I served as national security and intelligence officer to the Prime Minister for two years from May 2016 to May 2018 after several deputy minister appointments, the more recent being Global Affairs Canada and Canadian Heritage.

The role and functions of the advisor mirror the role and functions of the Privy Council Office, namely, providing independent advice, supporting the cabinet process and promoting the coherence and co-ordination of policy and programs of the national security organizations within the respect of their respective mandates.

I understand that the interest of the committee is primarily around the responsibilities of the advisor in ensuring that there is an appropriate vetting process for Governor in Council appointees at the time of selection, renewal or should allegations surface in the course of their appointment.

I wish to stress that my remarks and answers today will focus on the norms and practices that were in place during my term as advisor, norms and practices that for the most part have been in place for years.

As committee members have heard from previous witnesses, the responsibility to support the Governor in Council's appointment process resides with the Senior Personnel Secretariat of the Privy Council Office, or PCO. When it comes to the conduct of security background checks, the secretariat relies on the support of the Security Operations Division, SECOPS, that is part of the PCO. The responsibility of SECOPS is to work with the relevant mandated and expert partner agencies to confirm that the person being considered for an appointment does not pose a security risk, has no criminal background or other liabilities that could undermine their reliability to serve.

[English]

There are dozens of GIC appointments that take place every year. Given the need to protect the confidentiality of these appointments, the vetting process operates on a strict need-to-know basis. By this I mean that PCO senior personnel refers directly the names and information of potential GIC appointees who require a background check to SECOPS. The NSIA does not see the names and details of any potential appointee unless something comes up in the background check that raises concerns, from a security perspective, with the appointment.

This process respects the principle of need to know, while ensuring that senior level attention is devoted to information that could put in question the reliability of a GIC candidate to serve. The number of cases where such information surfaces is a handful. In any of these situations, the NSIA will engage very closely with the relevant senior officials in PCO senior personnel, given their lead responsibility for the appointment process.

I know that the interest of your deliberations today is to understand what happens if allegations were to surface while someone is already serving under a GIC appointment. This is also a rare occurrence. It may come directly to the NSIA, particularly if the allegations were already being investigated for a possible criminal offence, for example, by the RCMP, or a security dimension, let's say, by CSIS. In such situations, the NSIA would review the information, take the appropriate course of action and eventually engage with senior personnel.

In situations where the source of the allegation is not an established investigative body, it will most often come to the attention of PCO senior personnel. In such situations, if the nature of the allegation raises security concerns and may require the co-operation of an established investigative or screening agency, PCO senior personnel may turn to the NSIA for advice and, if warranted, follow-up actions. If the allegation does not engage security or criminality, there would likely be no reason to inform and engage the NSIA.

With regard to the specific allegations this committee has been examining—and I am referring to allegations made in 2015, prior to the appointment of the previous chief of the defence staff and the subsequent allegations made against him in the spring of 2018—I wish to make the following comments.

As the committee has heard, the 2015 allegations occurred prior to my term as NSIA, and none of these have ever come to my attention either prior to or once I became the national security adviser.

With regard to the subsequent 2018 allegations which, according to testimony, first emerged in a meeting between the former ombudsman and the Minister of National Defence and were subsequently brought to the attention of officials at the PMO and the Privy Council Office, I wish to indicate that these 2018 allegations were never brought to my attention.

I also think it is important to add that this is not necessarily unusual, particularly, as I explained before, if PCO senior personnel were not able to obtain information that would have allowed and warranted the pursuit of an investigation.

Madam Chair, this brings me to the end of my opening remarks. I will be happy to answer your questions to the best of my ability. I would, however, like to conclude by reiterating a few important points.

Like most Canadians, I am someone who cherishes the proud history of the Canadian forces. As a former official who has served Canadians through various roles with a nexus to the national security community, I have enjoyed a fruitful partnership with the Canadian Armed Forces. I can only hope that through collective efforts, including the work of this committee, women serving in this important institution can aspire to lead and contribute to the fullest extent without the fear of harassment in any form.

● (1235)

Thank you.

[Translation]

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

[English]

Rear-Admiral Patterson.

RAdm Rebecca Patterson: Madam Chair, I want to thank you for allowing me to come before you today as a witness, but also, in particular, as a senior leader in the Canadian Armed Forces, and very specifically as a senior woman leader in the Canadian Armed Forces.

What I hope to bring to the table is my experience working with women within the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces and help to share some of their voices as we move forward.

I'm looking forward to your questions. I certainly hope I can provide you with information you find useful and relevant as you move forward with this study.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Rear-Admiral Patterson.

Witnesses, thank you again for your patience. We really appreciate your being with us today. We know you have things to offer this committee and we are grateful for your time.

I will now open the floor for questions.

Go ahead, Madam Gallant, please.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We heard from Ray Novak, a former chief of staff to the former prime minister, that in July 2015 the NSIA was given charge of the investigation into a third-hand vague rumour against General Vance. Yet in March 2018, with concrete evidence of an allegation available, you were not consulted at all.

What is the threshold for the NSIA actually getting involved in an investigation against an OIC appointee?

Mr. Daniel Jean: Madam Chair, as I explained in my opening remarks, for the information to be taken from PCO senior personnel to the NSIA, they would have to determine that, first of all, they had enough information to assess whether it was an administrative matter or involved security or criminality. If it's an administrative matter, there would be no need to involve the national security adviser.

If the issue at stake involves possibly security or criminality, they would have to have enough information to do this. As I think has been acknowledged by many of the witnesses last week, you had a situation where there was information that the ombudsman had been given in confidence. He was not prepared to share it. The person obviously had reasons, the fear of reprisal, and didn't want to bring that information forward. However, unless you find a way to try to get that information and decide, is that an administrative matter or something that is criminal in nature, and who is best to assess that...? As many of the witnesses have said, including the judge advocate and Mr. Lick, you also have to see, what—

● (1240)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

Mr. Daniel Jean: —is the will of the witness as well?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay.

Does the national security adviser have the power to request investigations?

Mr. Daniel Jean: If the national security adviser thinks, for example, there is a criminal situation that has taken place, as any official, as a client he can basically write and ask the RCMP, if it's a federal crime, to investigate this. It's not an issue of having the power; it's the issue of being able to present evidence because of the crime that has been committed or possibly committed.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Does the Clerk of the Privy Council have the authority to start an investigation, to request an investigation?

Mr. Daniel Jean: To be clear, as a senior official you always have the right if you think there is sufficient information to trigger an administrative investigation. If you think the transgression you're looking at may involve or result in criminal action, you would normally then invite the RCMP to look at what you have and they would be conducting the investigation.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What's required, then, is the information. It is the RCMP then that conducts the investigations.

What's the full range of options the national security adviser has available to them when made aware of a complaint involving a Governor-in-Council appointee?

Mr. Daniel Jean: As I mentioned in my opening remarks, unless it's coming from one of the investigative agencies such as the RCMP, or CSIS in the case of security, most of the time this information will first come to senior personnel. They will assess whether it's an [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], whether it is a possible criminal action.

If they think there's a possible criminal action, most likely they will engage with us, and then we would look at whether we have enough to invite the RCMP, as an investigative body, to look at it. Then we would write to the RCMP asking them to look at the matter.

In these exchanges that happen, the RCMP might say, "Well, right now we don't have enough; you need to provide us a bit more to allow us to go forward with an actual investigation."

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: In the case of a chief of the defence staff, he or she holds sensitive security clearances, both Canadian and now with NATO.

Would it require absolute proof of misconduct before an allegation became a potential national security threat, or what is the threshold on that?

Mr. Daniel Jean: As you know, and I believe you heard it from the former Clerk of the Privy Council last week, the chief of the defence staff, as a GIC appointment, serves at pleasure.

People tend to look at both the administrative and the criminal process of investigation as the same. They are different. The thresholds are different.

If through looking at the information you were to decide that the transgression is serious enough that it undermines the role to play, of course, information and advice could be presented to the Governor in Council to stop the appointment, but you have to have sufficient information to be able to determine that.

I think as you have seen from all the testimony so far, the problem has been that the information was not made available because the victim had fear of reprisal and was not prepared to share the information.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are foreign intelligence agencies or covert government operatives known to exploit sexual misconduct incidents if they become aware of them through surreptitious means?

Mr. Daniel Jean: That is always a risk, of course, but it is not something that happens very often.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: If a chief of the defence staff had an allegation investigated after it was brought to the attention of the Prime Minister's national security adviser and that allegation proved to be true or was likely to be true, would that trigger a review of their security clearance?

• (1245)

Mr. Daniel Jean: It's always dangerous to be hypothetical, Madam Member, as you know, but if the information, when you assess it, is to the point that somehow the person could be subject to blackmail and it could undermine their ability, yes, that could be a factor, in the same way that financial difficulties could be a factor.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go on to Mr. Baker, please.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to both of our witnesses for taking the time to be with us here today.

My questions are for Rear-Admiral Patterson.

Admiral, I have about four questions, but I only have about five minutes for you to answer them, so I'll ask for your help, if you don't mind, in trying to get through them.

First, as the Canadian Armed Forces champion for women, if you were to give us one recommendation to ensure a more level playing field for women in the military, what would it be?

RAdm Rebecca Patterson: I have to tell you that the thing I would actually start with is families and looking at providing better support for families, because there's a barrier to child care, for instance. Having a more national program that allows women and families to move around more easily would be one of my primary recommendations.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Okay. Thank you.

As the Canadian Armed Forces champion for women [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] know that women have been integrating into all of the previously male-only trades and roles in the military for at least the last 30 years. Are there [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] targeted considerations and actions to assure women an equal playing field when they join the armed forces?

RAdm Rebecca Patterson: I think what you are really talking about here is looking at our culture writ large. What we really need to be having a look at is doing a systemic review to find out where those gaps are and where those deltas are in order to know whether to be.... It isn't just policy. It moves beyond there, but whether it be a policy.... It would be everything from the career paths that women follow and identifying the unintentional barriers that exist there, or to look at the equipment they wear: is it actually meant to help maximize [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]? On the more indirect side, we need to start really having a look at how we better tackle the permissive environment that allows types of misconduct to occur in the first place. I'm talking about all kinds of misconduct.

Then, recognizing the tightness of time, it's about making sure that we move forward and that there really is a true acknowledgment that there are inequalities in the Canadian Armed Forces, not just for women, but for all other marginalized groups who go there to serve. We have to acknowledge that there is an indifference towards pressing forward on women's issues. We can't just talk about senior levels. We have to go from the tactical level right through to senior level and talk about pockets of non-acceptance in how women serve. Then, finally, we need to be open and honest and listen to where unconscious biases are, basically making sure that we're fully consulting those who are most impacted by a system that wasn't built for us or by us.

That's really where I'd be looking.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Okay. Thank you.

I think have two minutes left for two questions.

As the commander of the Canadian Forces health services, can you tell me if there are areas specific to health care support that might benefit from targeted budgets so that women and other under-served groups [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] LGBTQ2, indigenous people and other people of colour so that they have evidence-based military and operational occupational care provision?

RAdm Rebecca Patterson: We know that in Canadian society writ large we have to start looking through a GBA+ lens, a sex- and gender-based lens, in order to determine how we deliver health care and notice those biases. You can say that it's something that is reflected within the Canadian Armed Forces, too, because it's a health care system that has been built to support men. While we've been making a lot of progress, moving forward we would benefit greatly from targeted research, for example, and from partnering with external researchers and advisers [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] how to create a health care system that provides support for women as they travel through their careers.

Within health services, I think that moving forward on projects that look at research, applying a sex- and gender-based analysis lens to how we deliver care and who we deliver care to will be very beneficial, because ultimately this is about the operational effectiveness of all people, and we need to build that into our systems as well.

• (1250)

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks very much.

I think I only have 30 seconds, so I'll be quick with this one.

As the commander of the health services, a critical-care nurse and previous officer in charge of Operation Honour, what are your recommendations to the committee for areas to focus on and consider to help best address sexual misconduct in the military?

RAdm Rebecca Patterson: I think we really are going to have to carry on with the culture change recommendations. We need, first and foremost, to address the fact that the supports need to be there for people who are survivors of sexual misconduct or have been victimized by it.

An area that I think is absolutely critical is the work that the sexual misconduct response centre is doing to enhance the programs, because people shouldn't feel that they can't be supported in their chain of command and need to go externally to have their voices heard.

Other areas that I think we need to focus in on would be moving forward with culture change and what that means, and receiving external advice, support, monitoring, etc., to do that.

I know I'm quite tight on time, but I would say that we stand by and welcome any reports that come from this and other committees focusing on the same thing, because misconduct is one aspect, but it also goes into how we effectively integrate all people who are not part of the dominant culture into the Canadian Armed Forces to get the change we're looking for.

These [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] value.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for RAdm Patterson.

RAdm Patterson, it is difficult for Canadian Armed Forces members who are victims of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment or rape not to feel listened to by their peers. In your experience, what are the consequences of victims not feeling heard?

[*English*]

RAdm Rebecca Patterson: Madam Chair, I think it really is looking into [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] one thing. It's having the ability to actually have their voice heard. I think, first and foremost, we do see long-term health consequences from not being able to have addressed the challenges that are facing you. People can have things such as moral injury coming out of this because, ultimately, members of the Canadian Armed Forces are part of another family. It's the family of work. It's how we are structured and formed. Therefore, one of the consequences of not being able to share your story is that you can become harmed by that, so I think we really need to focus—again, as we've said—on providing supports to survivors of sexual misconduct first and foremost, but we must be partnered with them, and not doing it to them. It's sort of like “nothing about us without us”. I know you've heard that before at this committee.

The second thing I think we also need to do is to focus on prevention as well. We need to, at the same time we're doing this, make sure that we're trying to prevent these incidents from happening in the first place. Again, that means preventing it and also making sure that everybody, from the most tactical level to the senior level in the Canadian Armed Forces, knows how to identify and address factors that cause misconduct to happen between people, whether that be [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the appropriate accountability has been established in there, and definitely by creating a psychologically safe environment.

In the short term, to try to better mitigate the health consequences of not being exposed to interpersonal violence in what is in effect your second family—which I think we need to focus in on—we also need to move down the path of continuing to prevent it so that we don't harm as many people as have been harmed already.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much.

I assume that the allegations against some of the most senior members of the Canadian Armed Forces and all the media coverage surrounding these allegations have had an impact on the morale of the troops. Can you tell us more about the climate that such allegations can create within the Canadian Armed Forces?

[*English*]

RAdm Rebecca Patterson: I will speak as the champion for women and as a commander of Canadian Forces health services, because there are 5,000 military, civilian and contracting personnel who work within health services.

It has certainly been a very challenging time. I know you've heard this before, but people feel very angry. However, when we dig down, especially to the voices through the Defence Women's Advisory Organization, we hear about exhaustion and disappointment. In particular, the break in trust, which we've heard mentioned before, comes down to being the straw that has broken the camel's back; but realistically, it's the systemic lack of being recognized and the lack of meaningful progress that we are having some of the biggest challenges with right now.

As we move forward, the idea is to rebuild trust. I'm going to go back to the same message again. First and foremost, we have to be there to support people who have been harmed, and we need to keep moving forward on that. We also need to continue to listen to voices from the tactical level through all the different minority groups that are out there so that eventually everybody will actually feel as though they're being heard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: In the military, people in positions of authority are often seen as role models. The hierarchical structure is really very important. The members sort of idolize those who have higher ranks. There is almost something mythical. Members are impressed with their knowledge and trust. In fact, there has to be group membership, and people have to trust the hierarchical structure.

When there are allegations like the ones we're talking about these days, does that have an impact on solidarity within the forces, or at least on confidence in the command?

[*English*]

RAdm Rebecca Patterson: I think I would say that it certainly has shaken our concepts of trust and faith as you move up through the chain of command. For us to truly and effectively move forward, we have to have a look at the factors within our culture that have allowed this type of behaviour to occur.

These are long careers we're talking about, but it isn't necessarily about just the duration of the career. We have to have a look at the fundamental power imbalances that exist in a rigid and hierarchical structure and what things go into supporting people whose behaviour is not aligned with what we see as acceptable as they move forward and progress in the ranks. Looking at moving away from a rules-based evaluation, promotion and appointment system is going to be quite important in doing that and focusing more on the values.

I think it was previously mentioned that as we are starting to move forward and select senior leaders now, we're looking at a 360-degree evaluation of them. It is not just about the face that is seen by senior leadership and the evaluation of a potential leader in the CAF; it's also about starting to hear the voices of others.

Another thing that we're absolutely going to have to deal with is gender stereotypes. This is why, as defence champion, I am here. Gender stereotypes has actually become a very neutral term to address things within our current structure. We're actually structured on a paradigm from quite a long time ago in which we ultimately favour certain genders and certain occupations with regard to positions of power. We value hypermasculinity, for example, in order to determine who the best leader [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] there

is, remembering that that excludes all women and men and non-binary people who do not conform to those standards.

Truly, as we—

• (1300)

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to interrupt you. That was fascinating.

I'd like to go to Mr. Garrison.

Go ahead, please

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to thank you, Rear Admiral Patterson, for your work as champion for women in the Canadian defence forces and for your very important testimony here this morning.

I want to ask a question, which you can decline to answer if it puts you in an awkward situation. I would like to know whether you have been consulted, at this point, by the current chief of the defence staff on measures to help restore trust in the military's commitment to rooting out sexual misconduct.

RAdm Rebecca Patterson: In fact, it has been a widely consulted process. I have very much been part of that process. In fact, we are also, through a phase called “listen”, going back to basics and listening to what the people have to say. In fact, at 14:00 we are certainly going to be listening to the Defence Women's Advisory Organization, local co-chairs, both military and civilian, as one team just to get their perspectives on what's going forward.

Mr. Randall Garrison: The current chief of the defence staff announced what he called the culmination of Operation Honour.

Do you believe that the allegations against senior military leaders of sexual misconduct have been a major contributing factor to having to wrap up Operation Honour and its lack of relative success?

RAdm Rebecca Patterson: I don't know the rationale behind the acting chief of the defence staff's coming out with that statement, but I can certainly tell you, as a former director general with Operation Honour until the summer of 2020, as well as in my position as champion for women, that language really matters. If you listen to people and recognize that Operation Honour, in terms of its name, has become something synonymous with what we do not want, that is, not with honour but with the opposite of honour, then I really do believe it is time to culminate the work that has been done.

We need to look to the lessons that have worked and ask what have we achieved, and then reshape it and move forward from here. I do believe the culmination is a good point. What it really means, for those who aren't used to military terminology, is that we've done as much as we can with this and that we now regroup and continue to move forward with where we're going next.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much.

I want to turn to Mr. Jean.

What you've said to me today raises a concern that sexual misconduct hasn't really been a part of the both national security advice and the general evaluation of GIC appointees.

Would you say that's true, that this has really been more limited to overt criminal acts and not really taken into account what I guess many would call the #MeToo movement?

Mr. Daniel Jean: No, I certainly would not want to be interpreted as having said that. What I said is there are two types of investigations. You have [*Technical Difficulty—Editor*] investigations when the allegation is about a transgression that is not of something that would be prosecuted as a crime. The national security adviser would not be responsible for that. This is exactly the type of situation where you would have to look at who is best suited to do that investigation.

If you think a crime has been committed, if it were not about someone in the Canadian Forces, you would probably be looking at providing.... Assuming you have the right information, you could provide it to the RCMP to investigate. In the case of a senior officer, you would have to look at dealing with the institutions within the Canadian Forces for that, the national investigation services.

I would not say it's not taken seriously. I think we've heard time and time again at this committee that there is a lot of fear among victims to come forward and provide information that would allow an investigation, whether it's something of an investigative nature or criminal nature.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you for that, Mr. Jean.

Madam Chair, given that we are over the allotted time for the committee today and we have completed one round of questioning, I would hope that these witnesses might be available for further questions on Friday.

I move that the committee now adjourn.

The Chair: I will ask the clerk to proceed with the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

My apologies to our witnesses. We really appreciate your willingness to spend an extra hour with us today. Unfortunately, we're not going to be able to take advantage of your offer.

The meeting is adjourned.

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