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Chair: Mrs. Karen McCrimmon



Standing Committee on National Defence

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• (1440)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 31 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the order of the House of January 25, 2021. Members are attending in person or via the Zoom application.

The proceedings will be made available on the House of Commons website, and so you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entire committee.

[English]

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. Please let me know if interpretation is lost at any time. We want to make sure that it is working well so that everyone can fully participate in the proceedings.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room. Please wait until I recognize you by name before you start to speak. Please speak slowly and clearly, and when you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

We will do our best to keep track of who wants to speak and when. It is much easier when it's done virtually via the Zoom application. That helps us to keep track of things. It's being fixed right now, because it's not up at the present time.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), the committee is meeting today to consider a request received by the clerk, submitted by four members of the committee, to discuss the request for additional witnesses pertaining to the study of addressing sexual misconduct issues in the Canadian Armed Forces, including the allegations against former chief of the defence staff Jonathan Vance.

I will now open the floor for debate.

Go ahead, Mr. Bezan.

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

I want to thank colleagues for meeting during this constituency week to consider a new motion to look at more witnesses and dive deeper into what actually has happened in the sexual misconduct al-

legations against former chief of the defence staff Jonathan Vance, former chief of the defence staff Admiral Art McDonald, and others, as this has evolved over the past 100 days.

Therefore, I would like to move the following motion. It was circulated by the clerk about 20 minutes ago, so I take it that all members of the committee have a copy in front of them.

It reads:

That, in respect of the committee's study on addressing sexual misconduct issues in the Canadian Armed Forces, including the allegations against former Chief of the Defence Staff Jonathan Vance,

(a) recalling that Zita Astravas, former Chief of Staff to the Minister of National Defence, was invited on Monday, March 8, 2021, to appear before the Committee within 14 days and was ordered by the House of Commons on Thursday, March 25, 2021 to appear before the committee on Tuesday, April 6, 2021, and did not appear on either occasion, the committee issue a summons for Zita Astravas to appear before this committee, at a televised meeting, at a date and time determined by the Chair which is no later than Friday, May 21, 2021, or two days following the adoption of this motion, until she is released by the committee, provided that, in the event that Zita Astravas defaults on the summons, (i) the clerk and analysts be directed to prepare a brief report to the House, outlining the material facts of the possible contempt the situation would represent, to be considered by the committee, in public, at its first meeting after the consideration of the main report on the study has been completed, and (ii) the Minister of National Defence and Gary Walbourne, former National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman, be invited to appear jointly on a panel for two hours, at a televised meeting, no later than Thursday, May 27, 2021;

(b) that the study be expanded to include matters related to the allegations against Major-General Dany Fortin, lately Vice President (Logistics and Operations) of the Public Health Agency of Canada, which have recently come to light, with a view to addressing these matters in the report referred to in paragraph (c) or, if that is not practically feasible, in a further report to be tabled before the House begins its summer adjournment, and, to this end, the committee invite representatives of the Canadian Armed Forces, the Privy Council Office and the Public Health Agency of Canada to appear as soon as possible to discuss these matters; and

(c) that the provisions of the motion adopted on Monday, April 12, 2021, concerning a report to the House, be supplemented as follows: (i) notwithstanding the motion adopted on Monday, April 12, 2021, drafting instructions and recommendations arising from the evidence received by the Committee after Friday, April 16, 2021, may be sent to the clerk, (A) in respect of evidence received before the adoption of this motion, within 24 hours of the adoption of this motion, or (B) in respect of evidence received as a consequence of paragraphs (a) or (b), within 24 hours of the adjournment of the meeting where the evidence was received, (ii) until Friday, May 28, 2021, the committee hold at least one meeting per week to receive evidence related to the study and at least one meeting per week to consider the draft report, (iii) at 2:45 p.m. on Friday, May 28, 2021, or, if the committee is not then sitting, immediately after the committee is next called to order, the proceedings before the committee shall be interrupted, if required for the purposes of the motion adopted on Monday, April 12, 2021, and every question necessary for the disposal of the draft report, including on each proposed recommendation which has not been disposed of, shall be put, forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment, (iv) the committee declines to request, pursuant to Standing Order 109, that the government table a comprehensive response to the report, and (v) dissenting or supplementary opinions or recommendations shall be filed, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(b), in both official languages, no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, June 4, 2021.

Madam Chair, I would like to speak to the motion.

• (1445)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As we know from testimony—

The Chair: Stand by for a minute. How long are you going to speak for?

Mr. James Bezan: I'll speak for five minutes or so.

The Chair: Other people will want to make sure they have time to study the motion and maybe they'd be in a position to ask you questions. As long as you're prepared to accept questions afterward, I think that would be fine.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay, let me lay out the rationale behind it. It is rather in depth and substantive.

The Chair: It is, very, yes.

Mr. James Bezan: As we all know, we have invited Zita Astravas to come to our committee. We know that we have had an order from the House of Commons to have her appear at this committee and that she has failed to appear on either of those occasions.

We know from testimony we've received from Elder Marques, Minister Sajjan, Katie Telford, Michael Wernick and Janine Sherman that nobody seems to know how the concerns raised by Zita Astravas regarding the allegations of sexual misconduct and evidence that were presented by Gary Walbourne to Minister Sajjan were received in the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office.

Mr. Marques said he was notified to look into the matter by Katie Telford. Katie Telford said she believed she was told by Elder Marques about the allegations against General Vance. We have Michael Wernick, who said he was contacted about it by the Prime Minister's Office.

The only person who can shed light on how the information flowed is Zita Astravas. We need her to appear to answer questions related to who she phoned, who she talked to and how many times she talked to different people within the Prime Minister's office and the Privy Council Office.

We also have the claim made by Katie Telford at the meeting at which she testified that she knew that what was being alleged did not present a safety concern. Who told her it was not a safety concern? I believe that Zita Astravas, who received first-hand information from Minister Sajjan, would be in the best position to answer how they knew this wasn't a safety concern and also how these allegations became reported as sexual harassment within all official documentation that flowed from the Prime Minister's Office to the Privy Council Office.

Now, if Ms. Astravas refuses to appear, I think that is an issue that needs to be considered as potential contempt of Parliament. I also believe that if she's unprepared to appear or if the government decides that ministers will appear on behalf of political staff, I then think it's only right that the Minister of National Defence, Harjit Sajjan, will appear alongside the former military ombudsman Gary Walbourne so we can get down to the facts instead of having, "I said this, and he said that." We need to have both witnesses sitting as a panel in front of this committee no later than May 27 if we cannot have Zita Astravas appear.

Interestingly, allegations came to light on Friday, at the end of a sitting week and before a break week for the House of Commons, against Major-General Dany Fortin, who's been seconded over to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

There's no question that the Canadian Armed Forces has been rocked by all of these allegations of sexual misconduct. There is now concern that the government actually knew about this for weeks. Prime Minister Trudeau said in his presser this morning that he was aware of these allegations and that he didn't do anything with them for several weeks. Canadians need to know how that information flowed and why it took so long to have General Fortin step aside while this investigation is ongoing. Major-General Fortin is saying that he just learned of these allegations when media approached him on them last week.

The Prime Minister was aware several weeks ago, so are we looking at another cover-up of sexual misconduct allegations in the Canadian Armed Forces, which as actually been compounded by the Prime Minister and his staff themselves? We need to drill down, and that's what paragraph (b) is about.

Paragraph (c) ensures that this committee will get to have a report tabled in the House before summer break. Essentially, we can start and still hear from witnesses that this motion calls to hear. We can have at least one meeting a week and have one meeting a week dedicated to consideration of the draft report and making additions to it as required, based upon new testimony that we hear. The purpose here is to ensure that by the end of business on Friday, May 28, we will then proceed to the approval of all outstanding paragraphs and recommendations in that report by a simple vote by roll call.

• (1450)

We'll go paragraph by paragraph, recommendation by recommendation if it's required, because the committee has been stalled on discussing elements of the report or on the recommendations themselves.

Madam Chair, this essentially is an autopilot motion to ensure that we get to the final end of this, that the report will be tabled, that it does provide a provision for minority reporting or supplemental opinion, if one or more of the parties sitting around this table are not comfortable with all of the recommendations, different paragraphs and language within the report.

I think it's fairly straightforward, although this is a fairly lengthy motion. It's clear to everyone that this is about getting down to who knew what, and when, bringing clarity to the conflicting testimony that we've heard from numerous witnesses, including the Minister of National Defence, Harjit Sajjan; Katie Telford, chief of staff to Prime Minister Trudeau; Elder Marques, a former senior adviser to Prime Minister Trudeau; and officials in the Privy Council Office.

I'm done. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you may go ahead.

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

I'd like to comment on the honourable member's motion, which contains some really interesting points. As I have repeatedly said, this process needs to culminate in a committee report. This work is important and should be reported on.

I think it's positive that the motion seeks to bring witnesses such as Ms. Astravas before the committee, so it can gather more information on the conflicting versions of events it has heard. If the committee is to have any hope of getting to the truth and being able to produce a final report, it absolutely needs to hear from Ms. Astravas.

It may be due to how the motion is worded, but I'm not sure whether the idea is to have the committee produce a final report or a preliminary one. Perhaps Mr. Bezan could clarify that, but my sense is that we may run into problems given the short time frame for hearing from witnesses and the fact that we may not have time to amend or, at least, adjust what we receive from the analysts. I don't know whether they plan to make adjustments to reflect the new evidence from witnesses. I think we need some clarity on that.

The motion also deals with calling witnesses in relation to the allegations against Mr. Fortin, or at least, beginning an investigation into the matter. I have to say, that makes me somewhat uncomfortable. According to the information that's out there, we are not talking about someone in a senior position or a position of authority who abused their power to do something wrong. At least, that is the impression I have. We have bits and pieces of information only. This makes me wonder whether we wouldn't be holding something of a people's court or, at least, investigating the matter ourselves. I have a hard time getting behind that part of the motion.

As for the rest, I look forward to hearing from Zita Astravas and getting clarification from her. If that doesn't happen, though, at least we would have the versions of the former ombudsman Mr. Wallbourne and the defence minister Mr. Sajjan to compare, because they really do not match.

• (1455)

The Chair: Very good.

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

We have Mr. Garrison, please.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I am happy to support this motion as it has been submitted. We have a critical issue before us. The study we've embarked on is about how a complaint against General Vance, as the former chief of the defence staff and the highest-placed Canadian military officer, was handled.

If we're to move forward on the serious crisis we have of sexual misconduct in the military, which includes a large number of those at the very highest levels, it's important to restore the trust, and that those at the highest levels, both within the military and politically, understand and will take action on sexual misconduct allegations.

To me, that's a fundamental part of what we've been doing in this study. I believe that Ms. Astravas is the one who can answer the question that is still outstanding before us. It's who made the decision not to investigate the allegations against General Vance, and if there was no decision, does this indicate that people didn't really understand the seriousness of sexual misconduct within the Canadian military?

Either one of those answers will be critical to instill confidence among the rank and file serving members and the Canadian public in any reforms that are suggested going forward. For that reason, I am supportive. I could support expanding the issue to include how the allegations against General Fortin were handled. I could also support the motion without section (b) in it.

I'm disappointed that the government rebuffed offers from me and other opposition members to set aside this most contentious report and to finish the two draft reports that we have before us on studies that we began before this study, on COVID-19—

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): On a point of order, Madam Chair, I believe the member is referring to what happened in camera. There were some other things in camera that I wouldn't mind saying about what Mr. Garrison tried to eliminate from the report, but I won't do that, because that would be out of order, as that was an in camera meeting.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Vandenberg.

Go ahead, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Well, Madam Vandenberg has just violated the in camera privilege that she cites.

I will say very directly that she spoke to me about this outside of formal meetings. We have spoken several times about setting this aside to move on to the other important reports.

Ms. Vandenberg can violate the sanctity of the meeting if she likes, but the fact remains—

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: On a point of order—

The Chair: This is not helpful.

Mr. Randall Garrison:—this offer was made several times.

The Chair: All right, this is not helpful. This is a substantive motion on the floor, and as per our normal practice, we're going to suspend for a few minutes to allow everyone a chance to read it so that they can possibly come up with amendments that might make it acceptable.

• (1500)

Mr. Randall Garrison: On a point of order, Madam Chair—

The Chair: The meeting is suspended.

• (1500)

(Pause)

• (1540)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

I think you had the floor, Mr. Garrison. Go ahead.

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

I'm going to return to what I was saying when the meeting was arbitrarily suspended. What I was saying is that this motion doesn't deal with the problem that we have two outstanding reports for studies that began before this study of sexual misconduct, reports that we made a great deal of progress on as a committee and that we were dealing with at the draft stage, as was published on the committee website earlier.

One of those is the COVID report. I really think there are important recommendations there. We're not out of this pandemic yet. We could face further repercussions, further waves. I think it's very important that this report gets tabled in the House of Commons to provide that advice.

The second report is on mental health in the Canadian Armed Forces. This is an issue that I've been raising in two Parliaments now, both the specific issue that self-harm remains a disciplinary offence in the military code of conduct and the more general lack of services for those in the Canadian Armed Forces facing mental health challenges. We still continue to lose one serving member a month to death by suicide, so we have a real crisis here that needs to be dealt with.

We had very important testimony with very important suggestions of what might be able to happen, and we have a draft report. At one point, our agenda very clearly and publicly said that we would deal with the draft report on COVID and then deal with the mental health report. Unfortunately, at the next meeting, the chair arbitrarily changed the order of business to deal with the sexual misconduct report.

I am going to once again express my disappointment that the government has rebuffed all offers to deal expeditiously with these two important reports and instead appears to be holding these reports hostage to get its way on the sexual misconduct report. Obviously, the sexual misconduct report is much more difficult for us to

make progress on because we have two different conceptions of what the question is.

I think that Mr. Bezan's motion helps us get at the essence of what the question before us really is: Why was there no action taken on allegations of sexual misconduct against General Vance in 2018, and why was he allowed to stay for another three years in charge of Operation Honour? If someone made that decision, we need to know who that was, and we still have contradictory testimony about that. If no decision was made, that raises an even larger problem of whether the Minister of National Defence in particular, or the Prime Minister's Office, actually understood the severity of the crisis of sexual misconduct in the Canadian military. As I have said repeatedly, until we answer those questions, any reforms going forward will be taken less seriously than they should be by perpetrators, and they won't have the full confidence of those who are survivors of sexual misconduct.

I am in support of this motion. As I said, with or without section (b), I would be prepared to vote in favour of the motion, but I do regret that the important work on COVID and on mental health in the Canadian Armed Forces is being held hostage by the government to try to force some concessions from the opposition on the sexual misconduct study.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garrison.

We will go on to Mr. Barsalou-Duval and then Madam Vandenberg.

[*Translation*]

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

Earlier, I spoke to Mr. Bezan's motion, which contains a number of important points, including the summoning of Ms. Astravas. My understanding is that she would be able to provide the committee with the information it needs to draft its report. I would not feel good about preparing a report without that information.

We have received conflicting information from both sides. I think Ms. Astravas could shed considerable light on the matter and give us the answers we are looking for. I really think it's important that the committee hear from her.

What I find quite frustrating is how much time we have lost, not to mention how much the stories have changed over time. These conflicting versions of events hinder the committee's ability to do its job properly, which makes hearing from Ms. Astravas all the more necessary.

The main reason I wanted the floor a second time was to put forward an amendment, one I referred to earlier but did not move formally.

I would like to do it now. I move that point (b), which deals with expanding the study to include the allegations against Major-General Dany Fortin, be removed.

I'm basically comfortable with the rest of the motion, as it stands right now.

That's my amendment, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: All right. The debate is now on the amendment.

Did you want to go ahead?

An amendment was put forward to remove section (b)—am I correct?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: My comments were in general, so I—

The Chair: Would you like to come back afterwards?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Sure.

The Chair: All right. Then it's Mr. Bezan, and then Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I had my hand up for a while because I wanted to respond to some of the questions that our colleague Mr. Barsalou-Duval had earlier. I wanted to again make sure that the committee understood that section (b) is about the new allegations that have come forward on General Fortin. We don't want to at all dive into the allegations themselves, and although this seems very fresh, we have moved quickly as a committee on all of the allegations against former generals and admirals as they became public.

It's interesting to note that all the action by the government doesn't take place until after media outlets start reporting on an allegation of sexual misconduct against one of our commanders. If you actually look at the way things have played out, February 2 is when Global News broke the story on General Vance, and then we had the headline on February 8 about Minister Sajjan not having acted upon it for three years. On February 9, this committee then had an emergency meeting, and we brought forward the motion to start the study into sexual misconduct allegations against the former chief of the defence staff. On February 24, news broke about sexual misconduct allegations against chief of the defence staff Admiral McDonald. We moved as a committee, and by March 8, we already had a motion to expand the scope of our study.

Having us look at the allegations against General Fortin—or, not the allegations, but rather how this information has been handled—is germane to the overall study. Again, we have allegations that broke in the news media that General Fortin wasn't even aware of last Friday, and Prime Minister Trudeau, in a press conference this morning, said he was aware of this several weeks ago, and of course it only became public after media sources started to report.

Madam Chair, and to my colleagues, it is important that we look into how that flow of information is being handled and why there is this lack of transparency. If we have commanding officers who are continuing to be implicated in sexual misconduct allegations, why are they allowed to stay in command posts as long as they have, until we actually get to the point in time when due process has been

completely fulfilled for both the complainant and the commanding officers?

We should be drilling down into this. On the report side, I'm not suggesting at all that we slow down the report, and that's why part (c) is there. It's to make sure that we have a timeline, that we have an autopilot in case we can't come to decisions through constructive debate and working together on the draft report. It's to ensure that we do get to the point of just voting on each paragraph and each recommendation as we go forward after the end of the month. If the Fortin part of this study yields some extra information on how information flows from the Canadian Armed Forces to the Minister of National Defence and up into the Prime Minister's Office, we can include it before the deadlines that are laid out in this motion and include it as a separate paragraph or two. If it is impossible because it actually creates more questions than answers, we would then have a supplemental report just on this part of the motion, on part (b).

It's about making sure that we can address the full scope of sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces as it's impacting our highest-ranking officers.

• (1550)

The Chair: All right, thank you, Mr. Bezan.

We will go to Madam Vandenberg, then.

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

I think the amendment would remove one of the problematic pieces of this particular motion, so of course we would be supportive of that.

In this country we do have due process. We want to ensure that people are not tried in the court of public opinion. I think that is incredibly important, not only for the person who stands accused but also for the survivors, for the people who are impacted by that behaviour. It is, I think, very important that we allow that due process. I would support the amendment.

However, there are significant issues both procedurally and with the content in this motion, and frankly, in the tone of the debate we started seeing here today.

First of all, a motion that is this comprehensive was once again table-dropped minutes before the meeting began, without any courtesy for other members of the committee, especially in an era when we're mostly using Zoom. We're not sitting side by side with our colleagues, as we normally are, when we can look to each other and say, "What do you think of this? What do you think of that?" We are at a distance.

The Zoom format also makes it more difficult to look at the other side and come to agreements on things, but even more so when something is table-dropped just before a meeting starts, when we have to start speaking on it minutes after the first time we read it. That's fine if it's a sentence that you want to change in a motion, but for a motion that is I don't know how many paragraphs long, it's very unfair. This has been a habit throughout the last number of weeks and months.

Having said that, I think there's some very inflammatory language being used here. I truly don't know where the idea that anybody would hold a report "hostage" is coming from. I know there have been many meetings set aside over the last few months in order to look at those draft reports, some of them when opposition members decided they were going to stop participating in camera in order to start a motion, as opposed to actually looking at the draft reports. This is something that's gone on for three or four months. I think there have been many attempts to make sure we do get those reports out. Frankly, I think we still would very much like to see all of the reports.

As a committee, we passed a motion that required that we would consider the sexual misconduct report before a certain date. I think to suggest that the chair is doing things unilaterally is very unfair when all the chair is doing is following the motion that was adopted by this committee, a motion with a particular timeline.

Having said that about the timeline, Madam Chair, I feel as though each time we get to a point where we say, "Okay, we're going to make sure we get this report done, and we have finalized all of the witnesses", then there's one more. I remember that in the discussions about having Mr. Elder come, the idea was, "Well, this is the last one we need. Once we get his perspective on things, we don't need to have any more" and we could move on with not just the reports but the next study, which is on military justice.

I can tell you from my discussions with survivors that military justice is an incredibly important piece. We know that former Justice Fish is working right now on finalizing a review of the National Defence Act that looks at military justice. I know that right now it is very important for us as a committee to move on to study that review.

Then we said, "Yes, of course", and Mr. Elder came. He said the exact same thing that all the other witnesses said, which was that clearly there was no substantive knowledge—I think his words were "very limited knowledge"—about what the complaint was. Nonetheless, there was an attempt by PCO to reach out, to try to have it investigated. Without knowing anything or knowing what it was or who it was, there was very limited ability to pursue any investigation. I think we heard from the Clerk of the Privy Council that there was an impasse.

Nonetheless, we were preparing at that point to get the report done. I would note that there's mention about differences of views about what this report is. This could be the single most important report that this committee does. This is one of the biggest issues facing the Canadian Armed Forces today.

• (1555)

Obviously the report is still in draft form, so I can't comment on the report itself, but I can comment on the recommendations that I know the Liberal members put forward. Out of 24 recommendations coming from Liberal members, 23 are focused specifically on survivors and on how to fix the system moving forward.

I believe there has been enough finger pointing. To be honest, we could do the same thing. We have seen in the Toronto Star this weekend some really concerning quotes. Different people are saying different things. What is becoming very apparent is that unlike what happened in 2018, it does not look like the allegations that Mr. O'Toole brought forward in 2015 were investigated at all. In that case, they actually had something. They knew where it occurred. They knew what it was. They knew that it was a relationship with a subordinate. There was actually something that could potentially have been followed up on, which—as we are starting to see and I think we could elaborate on—didn't happen.

I'll be honest. I would love to have this committee have both Mr. Fadden and Mr. Novak sit here side by side and ask them questions. Both of them are saying different things. Mr. Novak came to this committee and was very clear that there was an investigation, that everything was done properly and that it was Mr. Fadden who conducted the investigation. Now we find that Mr. Fadden is saying to the media that he did not, in fact, conduct any investigation and has no recollection of it.

We could keep the study going and bring those witnesses. We could bring.... Honestly, I have a whole list here of people we could add. I'm not sure, but perhaps that's something we need to do. What I would prefer is not to continue down this very politicized road. Every single time another witness is called, we think we're going to be able to get that report done, and then there's yet another one.

We had the chief of staff to the Prime Minister come. Even at that point, it wasn't enough. Now we're recycling back through the older witnesses, going back to Ms. Astravas and Mr. Walbourne and the minister. The minister was here for six hours at this committee alone.

It seems to me that at this point, what we're looking at is.... I'm not convinced that the opposition wants to see this report or the other ones see the light of day. Every time we get to a point where we could move forward as a committee, there is yet another motion and yet another series of witnesses to call. Now they're literally going back and recycling witnesses who've already appeared. I'm not entirely certain that this is completely good faith.

Having said that, I want to address some of the things in this motion.

First of all, we have a piece here that talks about Zita Astravas. First of all, the minister did come—

• (1600)

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: We are speaking to the amendment, not—

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Okay, I will save those comments for when we speak to the main motion.

In terms of the amendment and in terms of the process, I honestly think that if this committee is concerned about the survivors and about the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces, there are some very good recommendations in that draft report and in the other two draft reports.

Instead of continuing to put forward these procedural things and calling meetings so you can move motion after motion to surprise the other side with and putting things in that you know the other side won't agree to so that you keep the debate going, honestly, what we should be doing is getting the reports out. We should be moving on to the study on military justice and trying to use the time that we have in this committee to work together to find ways to solve the problem.

This is not a new problem. This is something that has existed for decades. It is something that I believe all governments have tried to find solutions to. I could go through all of the things that we have done since we came into—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Chair, I have point of order. We are discussing the proposed amendment and she is discussing our work, our line of business and our calendar. Could we get onto the amendment, please?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Chair, I am discussing the process that we took to get to this amendment and—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: That didn't have anything to do with—

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: —that it's a very poor process. I'm discussing what we could be doing instead of the amendment and the motion. Frankly, we could be doing some substantive work and getting substantive reports out that will really matter and make a difference.

I know that everybody on this committee wants the best for the women and men in the Canadian Armed Forces. I have no doubt about that. I would really hope that we can put the politics aside and try to work together on the areas where there is agreement so that we can put some real recommendations forward.

In terms of just this particular amendment, it removes one of the very poorly drafted pieces of what I think is an attempt to just delay the committee, so of course we'll support taking that out. If we want to go one by one, I would do the same for all of the parts of this motion. I think the entire motion is just designed to take up time.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Baker and then Madam Alleslev.

• (1605)

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

I have much to say about the rest of the motion as well.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to address Mr. Barsalou-Duval's amendment.

I think his proposal is very constructive, to be honest, so I applaud him for working constructively. What Mr. Barsalou-Duval is proposing is to remove the part of the motion calling on the committee to do what would normally be done by police or a court through due process, and the committee cannot fulfill that role.

We are a committee of elected members of Parliament, and it is not our job, as elected members, to conduct an investigation. That is something the committee has repeatedly heard from witnesses. It's important to have processes that allow professionals to do their job and conduct independent investigations into allegations.

[*English*]

I think Mr. Barsalou-Duval has proposed something concrete. His proposal to remove that section of the motion makes a lot of sense, because this particular element of Mr. Bezan's motion concerns allegations against Major-General Dany Fortin, and those allegations need to be investigated by the appropriate bodies.

We have heard from witness after witness at this committee that a lack of due process is part of the reason that so many victims, so many members of the armed forces, have lost confidence in the processes that should be there to defend their very interests.

This motion would go counter to that very recommendation, as we have heard over and over again. The fact that this section is even in the motion shows that the drafter of the motion hasn't heard that, or doesn't agree with it, and that the drafter of the motion believes that politicians should be investigating allegations. I just don't think that's appropriate.

[*Translation*]

I support Mr. Barsalou-Duval's amendment. If we really want to show that we have learned something important from the witnesses we have heard from these past three or four months, one of those things is the importance of due process, which is separate from elected members of Parliament. That means removing this part of Mr. Bezan's motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Madam Alleslev, please go ahead.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The point about investigating who knew what and when in the government around the allegations against General Fortin must absolutely stay in this motion. The reason is not that we are looking to influence or interfere in any way with due process or bring this into the court of public opinion. What we are doing in this committee, as our responsibility as legislators, is hold the government to account. We are the elected representatives who Canadians have sent here to hold the government to account, and the actions of the government—what they knew, how they acted and what they did—are what's material, not allegations about General Fortin.

We can leave that investigation quite separate, but how he remained in his position, how he was appointed to that position, who knew what, and when, and how they sat on this allegation, as they sat on other allegations that have been brought forward at this committee and done nothing with, is the responsibility of this committee. It is our responsibility to Canadians to hold the government to account, to understand whether or not they acted appropriately in dealing with not only General Fortin but also with the allegations around General Vance and the allegations around Admiral McDonald, which leads us to Zita Astravas, who has been called repeatedly by the House of Commons as well as this committee to appear on this study before the committee.

The Minister of National Defence appeared in her stead, and for the moment we, as a committee, decided that was appropriate. However, since then, information has come to light that contradicts the information that the Minister of National Defence provided on Zita Astravas' behalf, and therefore the only way to know what took place is to hear from Zita herself, which is why that is a critical element that we've been trying to get to since the very beginning of this study.

I, like Ms. Vandenberg, am also disheartened by the tone that this committee is being forced—or feels that they are being forced—to take at this juncture. That is largely because of the way that the matters are being dealt with, from arbitrary suspensions to adjournments to, yes, filibustering to ensure that we can't get to a vote.

If we really want to move forward, then we need to be able to make our points clearly and succinctly and then be able to get to a vote and allow the will of the committee to transpire, instead of simply discussing and complaining about the tone. In fact the tone could quite clearly change if there weren't a filibuster by various members, which would go a long way toward improving the situation and allowing us to do the job that we have been sent here to do.

That brings me to my third and most important point. Yes, we do agree that this may be one of the most important studies that we have done as a defence committee, and we have done it at the moment in time that this information is required. We have seen from lengthy study of witnesses' testimony that the government perhaps did not behave in the way that we expected them to behave—appropriately, efficiently or accordingly—and we need to make recommendations to ensure that it doesn't happen in the future. That's why we need to put in place a timeline to ensure that this report moves at the pace that it needs to and that various factions of this committee are not able to unduly hold up the process.

• (1610)

More importantly, I think we need to understand from the government why, when they had the opportunity to implement all the recommendations in the Deschamps report, they didn't, and why, with Bill C-77, a clearly important aspect of victims' rights, they didn't implement those either, so—

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: —we need to be moving forward rather than holding things up.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: I just wanted to refer to Ms. Gallant's most recent comments to keep this discussion focused on the amendment.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Mr. Spengemann.

Madam Alleslev, are you done, or do you have more remarks?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I am done for the moment. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have made my point.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

We go back to you, Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I'll be brief.

Despite what my colleague just said—and I appreciate her argument—it will not be possible from a perception perspective to distinguish between the kinds of things that she wishes to bring to the committee and the kinds of things that are going to be subject to an investigation. There are now three investigations involving the former chiefs of the defence staff and Major-General Fortin.

It's extremely important—and we've heard this time and again throughout the entire testimony on this study—that there be no political interference. It's not just actual political interference; it's the perception thereof. If the committee now is engaged in looking at these cases as cases, there's a great risk that arguments that will be brought before this committee and names that will be put forward by this committee would also be arguments and names that would be subject to the investigative process. It is therefore extremely important that they be kept independent. For that reason, I would support the amendment that was brought forward, with my thanks to our colleague Monsieur Barsalou-Duval.

Even with the amendment, though, I think when Mr. Bezan opened the discussion, he said he had a desire to dive in deeper. I think the motion taken as a whole is still an exercise that remains at the top level, that looks at individual cases and headlines—at the tip of the iceberg, so to speak—and does not go into the depth of the systemic issues that the Canadian Forces faces. I think it's a little disingenuous to suggest that there are weeks of study left during which the committee could turn its attention to the recommendations. Even with the amendment that's before us—and I support it—I think there will be very little, if any, time left for the committee to actually look at, discuss and prioritize the recommendations.

Therefore, I disagree with the perception that's being created by Mr. Bezan that there is time, or weeks, left to study the recommendations. There really isn't, especially with the additional names that the original motion wanted. It seems rushed and it seems that there is no discussion to turn the committee's attention to what matters most to the current and former serving members, particularly the women, of the Canadian Forces. That is the question of how we break the systemic challenge of sexual misconduct in the armed forces if we just look at a couple of individual cases that are symptomatic of it, important as these cases may be, but do nothing more than that in a fairly rushed report.

That would be extremely unfortunate, and as my colleague has just pointed out, this is really an opportunity, perhaps the most important opportunity in this committee's recent history, to correct a significant wrong across the nation that is being looked at as much by other countries as it is by Canadians. It would not be a good outcome if this committee did not take that opportunity very, very seriously.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Spengemann.

We'll go to Mr. Bagnell and then Monsieur Robillard.

Go ahead, Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'll just speak to the amendment. As I think Mr. Baker said, there is a lot to speak about on the other parts of the motion. In fact, as people have said, there are a lot of substantive parts. It doesn't deal with the main, big issue—the elephant in the room in the military—but there are a lot of parts. I think we each ought to figure out whether each one should be discussed with an amendment. They're totally different and have different ramifications. I'll just deal with this particular amendment first.

I agree with Mr. Barsalou-Duval on the amendment. The surveys that have been done recently showed that there are hundreds of allegations continuing to go and that people are aware of situations that are going on. Every few days there is a new one. We've studied these allegations every time there is one. In fact, we've spent so many meetings on one email that we'll never really get, as some members have said, to the substantive items about misconduct in the military, the chain of command link, the fact that people are worried about reporting because of repercussions, and the whole culture item. Those are the things.

Rather than going complaint after complaint, witness after witness on one individual situation, on one email, as I've said in all the meetings, it would be much better to get on with recommendations to help members of the military feel safe and deal with the substantive issues.

I'll leave it at that for now. I have a lot to say on the other parts of the motion, including the more serious allegations that were brought up about General Vance's appointment.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Mr. Bagnell.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Robillard.

[*English*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Madam Chair, I think we have heard enough. I'm asking for the vote.

• (1620)

The Chair: Mr. Baker had his hand up already. Did you want to speak before the vote, Mr. Baker. or...?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm sorry; I was having trouble finding my mute button.

If I can, I'd just like to speak to the amendment. Can I do that, or is that...?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Okay.

[*Translation*]

I want to add to what I said earlier. I think Mr. Barsalou-Duval's amendment gives us an opportunity to apply what the witnesses told us. According to them, when allegations are made against someone, an independent investigation has to be carried out.

Under the initial motion, we, as members, would conduct an investigation into the matter. It's clear that what the witnesses told us went over the head of whoever drafted the part of the motion Mr. Barsalou-Duval is proposing be removed.

That's all I have to say.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

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

We will now go to the vote on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The amendment carries.

Mr. Baker, your hand is up.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Madam Chair, I was hoping to speak to the motion.

The Chair: That is where we are now. You are speaking to the motion as amended, correct?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm speaking to the amended motion. That's correct.

There are a few points I want to raise.

First off, I want to speak about something that Ms. Vandenberg spoke about, which is the way in which this motion was brought forward. This is a substantive motion. There are many elements to it, with a range of implications. That it was brought forward minutes before this committee meeting started, as has been done by the members opposite many times during the hearings on this study, is incredibly disappointing.

The reason notice is given—and the members opposite know that—is that it gives members who haven't yet seen the motion a chance to consider the implications of the motion and therefore use our time in committee productively. That hasn't been done on multiple occasions, including this time. Madam Chair, you've spoken at a number of the meetings about how table-dropping motions at the last minute is counterproductive, yet despite those flags, the members opposite decided to do that again.

I'm concerned about it because it doesn't allow the members who haven't seen the motion to be able to properly consider the motion before having to debate it and ultimately vote on it. I have the opportunity to work with some of the members opposite in other settings, and that's not how I treat the members opposite in the committees—not even the committees, but some of the other projects on which I work with them.

I just want to take this opportunity to ask the members opposite to not do that, as certainly I, on my end, would not do that to them. It's counterproductive to our committee's work.

The other point I want to raise is that this meeting is being held because of a Standing Order 106(4) motion by four of the Conservative members. That is why we are meeting during a constituency week. Aside from the fact that a motion was brought at the last minute without warning—which I've already spoken about—what's particularly disappointing about this meeting is that the Conservatives chose to use this meeting to bring forward a motion that really seeks to do nothing more than politicize this issue for them and play further political games with an issue that deserves a substantive study, substantive recommendations, and substantive work by thoughtful MPs who actually care about solving the problem of sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces. That's what this should be about.

This motion is not that. This motion is about trying to call more and more witnesses to answer the questions that have already been answered countless times before this committee and that have absolutely nothing to do with actually tackling the problem of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Canadian Armed Forces. It boggles my mind that those questions have been answered over and over again, in some cases by having the same witnesses come back over and over again to answer the same questions over and over again. We're recycling witnesses.

This motion calls for the calling of witnesses we've already heard from, just to answer questions we've already heard the answers to multiple times. We've had evidence presented to answer those questions multiple times. To me, this is incredibly disappointing—and I'm being diplomatic—because what we should be doing, in my view, is focusing every minute we possibly can at this committee on writing the report that actually makes a difference for the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces who are suffering sexual harassment and sexual assault.

How can members sit here and say that they care about that issue when they want to use virtually... This motion calls for using the majority of the committee's time to further politicize this issue and to call more witnesses to answer the same questions, which serves only to further politicize the process. No matter what those answers are to those questions, they serve nothing. They do nothing to help

the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces who need our help.

All the members of this committee have said that they've spoken to men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces who are asking us—many of them are begging us—to take action on this issue, to make recommendations and to voice our position on what should be done. That's what that report is for. That's the mechanism by which we as a committee can do that. We as MPs can make a difference. That's why we all ran for office: to make a difference.

• (1625)

Here's an opportunity to make a difference, and instead of making a difference on that issue, this motion calls for more politics. What message does that deliver to the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces? I would just ask my colleagues opposite to think about that.

Let's get to work on that report. Let's use every single minute we can at this committee to write that report, to make a difference. Instead, we are putting forward a motion that calls for the recycling of witnesses for more politicization. I suspect that many victims and survivors are watching this committee; I cannot imagine what they're thinking when they see this type of motion brought forward. Those who are supporting this motion aren't saying they're serious about tackling this issue; they're saying they're serious about more politics and games and drawing headlines.

I'm sorry, but that's not why I ran for office. That's not why the folks in Etobicoke Centre elected me to be here. They elected me to solve problems that face Canadians, and the biggest problem that is faced by the Canadian Armed Forces at this moment is sexual harassment and sexual assault, so let's solve it. Let's get to work. Let's write a report and make a difference. That's why I'm here.

To have this meeting during a constituency week, when my constituents and constituents of all the members of this committee are facing a pandemic and need their MPs to be available to them, is disappointing. What we could have done and what we should be doing is focusing on writing that report. If we were going to meet during a constituency week and we were actually going to tackle this issue, write the report and make a difference for the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, I'd be all for it. I'm sure my constituents would be very supportive of it, but that's not what this is about. I have to tell my constituents that I'm not focused on responding to their needs during the pandemic because I need to be part of a discussion about political games that the opposition wants to play. How is that okay?

I'm disappointed on that front as well. I think my constituents who are watching this would be as well. I would think constituents of some of the other members would be disappointed as well.

I think the motion itself focuses on questions to which we've heard answers, and if we've heard the answers, we can write the report. If the members opposite want to write a report and make it full of the political conclusions they've drawn, they can propose that. That can be part of the discussion around the writing of the report, or they could write a report dissenting to the will of the committee. That's their choice.

We've heard the answers to these questions. Let's do what we were elected to do, which is write a report that serves the members of the Canadian Armed Forces and serves the victims who've told us they want action. Let's take action. That's why I ran for office. I think that's why all of the other members did too.

Let's get to work on the report. Let's defeat the motion and do that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Mr. Spengemann, please go ahead.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Madam Chair, thank you very much.

This is on the main motion. I want to thank colleagues for the change we made in it through the amendment.

We've said a lot about the virtue of having the power to summon somebody, and many of us, I think, have thought a lot about the restraint we need to exercise when deciding to issue a summons. This is a tool that's best held in a committee's vest pocket as something to use only as a last resort in extreme circumstances.

We've had extensive testimony from officials at the Prime Minister's Office, from officials at the Privy Council Office and from the minister himself, who was in front of this committee for six hours alone. As my colleague Mr. Baker just said, the desire on the part of some of us to want to recycle through some of that testimony at this point, with the runway we have left, really isn't helpful.

I want to take Mr. Bezan at his words, which I cited in my last intervention. He has expressed a desire to dive in deeper, to really do the work to correct the issue of systemic sexual misconduct in the Canadian Forces. Diving in deeper doesn't just mean looking at the most recent case in the headlines. It means looking at the recommendations in the Deschamps report; it means look at the witness testimony; it means listen to the minister, who has flung the door open, saying that the time for patience is over and that we need complete culture change now.

The volume of recommendations in our minds and hopefully in discussion within in this committee is extensive, and prioritizing those recommendations is incredibly important to serving women, to former serving members of the Canadian Forces, to male allies, to recruits, to members of our reserves, to those deployed overseas, to those deployed at home. Nothing could be more important at the moment for the Canadian Forces.

With respect to the time frame we have, when we look at the motion and the window of May 28 and a desire to bring in additional witnesses now, we can see that it would require a week and change to drill through these recommendations, prioritize them and identify

the ones that are going to be most impactful and pass them to the House of Commons before we break for the summer.

This is hard work. This is work that will take discussion among ourselves. This is work that will take place not in front of a camera, but among colleagues—with disagreements, yes, but with a desire to actually achieve the change.

Mr. Bezan brings a motion and says he wants to dive in deeper. This motion leaves out a significant issue, Madam Chair, concerning the time when the former chief of the defence staff was appointed. There are witnesses whom we could potentially, and maybe should, hear from again. In the same breath as Mr. Bezan brings forward the name of Ms. Astravas, we could ask for Richard Fadden. We could ask for Ray Novak and we could ask for Erin O'Toole, who, at the time of appointment of the former chief of the defence staff, was in office.

I'm not saying this to be partisan. I'm saying it because the former chief of the defence staff is now reported in the media to have said that he “owns” the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service. Back in 2015, he felt that he “owned” the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service.

From a systemic perspective on the deep-rooted, systemic sexual misconduct problem that the Canadian Forces have, nothing could be more important than a former chief of the defence staff saying that he “owned” the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service. How can any one official rise to a position of asymmetric power within the Canadian Forces to have that kind of influence and to potentially alter or quash or get rid of investigative processes at the stroke of a pen or at the click of a keyboard?

That is a systemic issue that goes far beyond the name of Jonathan Vance. That is a systemic issue that my Conservative colleagues and colleagues from all parties on this committee should be deeply interested in.

If I saw the names I just mentioned and saw a desire to look at them in this motion, I would say that this is a transpartisan motion that is really focused on the issue at hand, but we don't see their names. I take seriously the comments from my colleague Mr. Baker that this is not a time to play partisan politics but a time to move to the same side of the table, with very limited runway left and with full knowledge of what the recommendations are that are at issue. We have them; we've identified them.

What we need to do now is prioritize them, sequence them, adopt them and pass them as a committee—not in a single session without any further discussion, but with deliberation, with thoughtful input from all sides, having listened to our experts, our witnesses, and the women and men who have served in the Canadian Forces.

• (1635)

Nor is it just those who served just during this Parliament; we've heard their voices in the previous Parliament and in other studies. The issues are known. The willingness on the part of the minister and this government are there. The country is now looking to our committee as the pivot point to take these recommendations and put them into the hands of government so that in very short order we will have made the changes that are so urgently needed.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

We will go on to Mr. Bagnell, please.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As Mr. Baker said, we've heard all sorts of testimony about the big problem—sexual misconduct in the military—and three overriding themes that aren't addressed in this motion, number one being the culture, number two being the fear of reporting and number three being provisions to deal with those so that people feel safe outside the chain of command.

As Mr. Baker said very passionately, which is why I won't use all my time right now, and as we've both said since we started, this is what we should be focusing on to get the answers to those major problems so that people can again, or for the first time, feel safe, especially women in the military. Many have said in reports that they were aware of those problems or have been affected by them directly.

I sympathize with Mr. Garrison's comments that we should get on with the three reports, and I pass that on to anyone who keeps moving motions to bring more witnesses to deal with the one email. We had one email that had details that the person had every right not to want to be provided, so it was investigated right away, yet we're dealing, meeting after meeting, with that one email when we should be dealing with the major issues in the military. It would be easy to do if we just got on to the report.

On the elements of the motion, the first one related to a witness we've already dealt with. The minister replaced that witness, so obviously we need an amendment related to that and a discussion on that. On a second item, as the chair said, this is a very complicated motion, so I still have to have more study on it. Obviously we have to have more discussion and debate down the road on an amendment related to the scheduling of the report.

I don't see that it leaves very many meetings to discuss the substantive recommendations in the report on the schedule that's proposed in the study, and it seems that the motion suggests that a whole bunch of clauses.... There are many clauses and recommendations. As Ms. Vandenbeld said, all the Liberal recommendations except perhaps one deal with the survivors and these problems that we're talking about, but it sounds like the motion is suggesting that all those that aren't dealt with in the short period of time are just are voted on without any discussion, without any politicians who have been elected by their party being able to comment and give their provisions. They just have a vote.

I think we have to have an amendment on that at some time in the future. When we get to that, I would really like to know—and

research can be done between now and when that happens—what kind of precedent there is for just approving a report clause by clause with no discussion or recommendation by recommendation with no discussion. I would find that people wouldn't take such a report seriously if we weren't even allowed to debate it and weren't even allowed to debate the recommendations and put comments related—

• (1640)

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: When did we do that in this meeting? In this meeting we have not discussed putting forth this report without going clause by clause.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: It's in the motion.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I'm sorry. My understanding was that there wouldn't be any discussion on each clause after a particular...

That's why, when you drop a complicated motion that we haven't had time to analyze—I wonder what Mr. Garrison thinks about getting a motion a few minutes before a meeting—with regard to the ramifications of these details about the way in which the report would go when we meet the deadline, I am asking these questions. I don't understand the process that is in the motion. That's why we need to at least debate it. As I said, I'd like to know the precedent on that and what the actual ramifications of that part are.

Finally, I want to go into great detail later. As was mentioned earlier in the meeting, if we can't get down to the serious recommendations that we should be making to help the Canadian military related to chain of command and fear of reporting and culture and we have to keep studying these.... As was mentioned before, recently—probably after the motion was written, which is why it's not as relevant—much more serious allegations have come forward related to the appointment of General Vance and investigations that were or were not done, but I'll go into all that later. I'm assuming that's still a work in progress too and that more information is coming out on those serious allegations that have been raised by the Toronto Star, Global News and whoever else did those investigations.

I'll leave it at that for now. I'll go into that in great detail probably the next time I'm up.

• (1645)

The Chair: All right.

Madam Vandenbeld, you're next.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I'm not sure who had their hand up first, me or Mr. Baker.

The Chair: It was kind of at the same time.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Okay. If he wants.... Okay, I'll go—

The Chair: If you don't mind, then, I'll let Mr. Baker go first. Is that all right?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Okay.

The Chair: Thanks.

Go ahead, Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

I just wanted to share something with the committee.

In my previous intervention, I spoke about how important it is that we address the underlying problem of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the military and get to a report, because I think that's the way in which this committee can actually make a difference on this issue. I wanted to share with you some remarks. They're not long. They're remarks from Christine Wood. I think many of you have met Christine Wood. To me, Christine Wood is someone who is incredibly courageous and is taking her experience and translating it into advocacy. I find Christine inspiring, honestly.

I wanted to share with you some of the things she said to FEWO:

It is an honour to be here, and it's an honour to represent the group It's Just 700.

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

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are we debating the motion or are we debating a recommendation in the forthcoming report? I don't understand what this quote has to do with the motion before us today.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Gallant.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Madam Gallant, if you just took the time to hear me out, I think you'd understand the relevancy.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We've taken a lot of time. Let's get on with the motion.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Madam Chair, I'm speaking to the motion.

The Chair: Please go ahead, Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'll start at the beginning. This is from Christine Wood. These are remarks she delivered to FEWO.

It is an honour to be here, and it's an honour to represent the group It's Just 700.

Five weeks ago, unexpectedly, the founder of our group, Marie-Claude Gagnon, who most people know as "MC", stepped down. She stepped away from It's Just 700.

After six years of advocacy at the highest levels of government, she has reached a point where the cost of giving insight, voice and access to hundreds of men and women is too great a price to pay alone, so something simple but important to remember as we engage today is that this is hard stuff. This is ugly stuff. Sexual assault isn't talked about lightly. It's an ugly side of human nature. At this point, I really believe that sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces is a national embarrassment. Our collective Canadian conscience has been hit hard by the recent high-profile allegations of inappropriate sexual behaviour by our most senior leaders. It is outrageous that two chiefs of defence have faced allegations within weeks of each other, but it's even more outrageous to accept that every year on average 1,600 people report a sexual assault within the CAF. This isn't friendly fire. It's not an accident or an honest mistake. It's rape, and it's abuse of authority.

I can tell you things that you have heard before.

Victims need supports. There are more and more coming forward and there is still no safety net there to catch them. These individuals are not coming forward to report a simple discrepancy that they saw in paperwork. They are coming forward with their experiences of terror, debilitating anxiety and shred-

ded self-confidence. They are broken. It is simply unethical to continue to ask them to come forward without having a plan in place to support them.

To be clear, we are asking for the same supports that we were asking for four years ago: a national platform for online peer support, group therapy, outpatient therapy and in-patient psychiatric care when necessary that is MST-specific in its focus. It needs to be trauma informed and needs to be able to address the moral injury of betrayal by your brothers and sisters in uniform.

The "nature, duration and severity" of our injuries is something that every affected individual is struggling to explain right now. That's the terminology used in the settlement forms for the class action lawsuit: the nature, the duration and the severity. So many people are struggling to find the words. It's not easy, and neither are the next steps forward. Up front, I need to say again that we need care. It has to be targeted. Post-traumatic stress disorder is chronic, and it can be deadly. It doesn't matter where the trauma came from. The end result is what it is.

Sexual trauma is not necessarily worse or easier than combat trauma. It's just different. I'm sure you're aware of the following: that one in five victims is a man; that military life is exceptional but places exceptional roadblocks in accessing care; and that we frequently are posted and moving or on long-term training courses and, most often, are away from our extended family.

It's unfortunate that we are still trying to get an agreed-upon definition of military sexual trauma, MST, as now it is an American term. If we in Canada can develop our understanding in black and white of military sexual trauma, we can have greater research, data and access, and provide targeted treatment.

I share that testimony for a few reasons. One is that to me it's a reminder of why we're here, of the the issue, of what's at stake, and that there are so many people like Christine Wood. Christine Wood is advocating for many others. I want to remind folks of what's at stake and the suffering that people are going through. Through that testimony that I just read to you, Christine Wood speaks to how long victims have been waiting for a solution in terms of care and in terms of changes in culture, so many elements that we've heard about at this committee from witnesses, experts in the field, members of the forces, etc.

• (1650)

I highlight the point that Ms. Wood made because I don't want to keep them waiting any longer. I don't think we should.

Basically the motion before us would dedicate the committee's time to more politics and more headline grabbing rather than addressing what Ms. Wood is fighting for and advocating. The fact that she speaks to how long she and others have been waiting motivates me to get this done. Maybe one of the reasons they've been waiting so long is that at committees like this that have preceded me in this Parliament, in the House of Commons, the discussions have been highly politicized, as this one is. I don't know.

I would love for us to break through the politics and just deliver for these folks. Let's deliver for Christine Wood and the others she's advocating for.

In the testimony I just read to you, Ms. Wood says that “sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces is a national embarrassment.” I agree, and the only thing that would exacerbate that embarrassment for me, and for many people, would be if this committee ended up playing more politics instead of tackling the issue at hand and solving the problem—or helping to solve the problem, at the very least.

In the segment I just read, Ms. Wood talks about how the “Canadian conscience has been hit hard by the recent high-profile allegations of inappropriate sexual behaviour by our most senior leaders.” She says, “It is outrageous that two chiefs of defence have faced allegations within weeks of each other, but it's even more outrageous to accept that every year on average 1,600 people report a sexual assault within the CAF.”

In her testimony, Ms. Wood is asking us, as a parliamentary committee, to find solutions. She's not asking us to headline grab, draw attention, point fingers at each other, or point fingers at anybody. She's asking us to solve the problem, to ease the pain that people are feeling.

These are her words: “Victims need supports. There are more and more coming forward and there is still no safety net there to catch them.”

Let's help create that safety net. Let's do that. The members of this committee have heard from witnesses and have talked about what that safety net may need to look like and how it should be structured. We've heard from Madam Deschamps. We've heard from other experts who talked about what that looks like. Let's translate that into something concrete.

Ms. Wood is talking about people. She says that “They are coming forward with their experiences of terror, debilitating anxiety and shredded self-confidence. They are broken. It is simply unethical to continue to ask them to come forward without having a plan in place to support them.”

If it's unethical, if you agree with Ms. Wood—and I agree with her—then let's help solve that problem. If we prolong that agony, if we prolong that lack of solution because of this motion, which would have us move away from the solutions and play politics, then we're contributing to that. Let's not contribute to that. Let's fix it.

She says, “We are asking for the same supports that we were asking for four years ago: a national platform for online peer support, group therapy, outpatient therapy and in-patient psychiatric care....It needs to be trauma informed and needs to be able to address the moral injury of betrayal by your brothers and sisters in uniform.”

• (1655)

She says they're asking for the same supports they've been asking for four years ago. Are we going to be reading more testimony from Christine Wood or those who follow her four years from now? That's unacceptable. If we're not going to contribute constructively by writing a report recommending whatever those things are that the members of this committee heard or the things we want to recommend, whatever they are—and, for what it's worth, I think we should recommend those things—then we're not helping to contribute to solving that problem.

I've not talked about all of her testimony; I've talked about elements of it. I've read it all to you, but then I picked out segments to highlight some of the components that speak to me. I guess I'm just imploring the members of the opposition, the members of this committee, to heed her words. I think that if Christine Wood were here, it would be difficult to look her in the eye and say that it's a good idea for us to pass this motion and spend the vast majority of the committee's time not writing the report that could help her, her colleagues and the others she represents instead of playing politics. I think it would be very hard to look her in the eye and tell her that.

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

The Chair: Thank you. Go ahead, Madam Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I might point out that there were several recommendations made by Deschamps almost six years ago now that could have been implemented—

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: That's debate.

• (1700)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: —so if he were genuine about what he's saying, those can be implemented right away.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: That's debate, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gallant.

Go ahead, Mr. Baker. You can finish.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you.

Before that point of order, I was just summarizing. I was saying that I'm inspired by Christine Wood and people like her. She's suffering. Her colleagues are suffering. They're showing a tremendous amount of courage and they've spoken out about how long they've been waiting. If we can contribute even one ounce toward that solution, toward alleviating that suffering even just a little bit, I think that should be our number one priority. Let's make it our priority. Let's defeat this motion, and let's solve this problem.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baker.

We'll go on to Mr. Bagnell and then Mr. Spengemann.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: It's always hard to go after Mr. Baker because I think he's saying what many committee members are thinking but can't say as well, and I think all the committee members want to help the members of the CAF with the three main problems that Christine had outlined, the chain of command, the reporting and the culture, and as I said before, that's what we should get on to.

In reply to what Mrs. Gallant said, I agree with her that there were a lot of things in the Deschamps report. The many steps that were taken by the present minister have been outlined in this committee, but there are things that were not done, and so the form that they should take is exactly what we should be discussing now to deal with those particular issues.

As I said, I'd rather we just stopped all this and got on to dealing with those three major issues to help the members in the military, but if there are committee members who still want to do the "who knew what, why and where", as was said earlier in this meeting, there have been much more serious allegations raised, probably since this motion was written and certainly since the last meetings, related to the appointment of General Vance in the beginning.

Mr. O'Toole, when he was Minister of Veterans Affairs, passed on a potential rumour, a complaint, to Ray Novak, who very nicely came before committee and provided his thoughts on that. He mentioned that he had asked the national security adviser, Richard Fadden, about the Gagetown incident and to look into it, but the media have suggested that Mr. Fadden has said he does not remember investigating that particular complaint or actually receiving it, although he doesn't disagree with Mr. Novak's memory that he may have mentioned it to Mr. Fadden, but there doesn't seem to be any evidence of that investigation or that it was acted upon.

If there was a complaint and it wasn't investigated or it wasn't acted upon, then why was General Vance appointed? On all these things, I think we need more details.

I've just heard from the media. I haven't had time to sort it out. Some of it I just saw this morning and the others I was just reading about on the weekend, but the outgoing chief of staff at the time said he was crystal clear that there was no allegation related to misconduct by Vance at Gagetown that was ever brought to him, and he was helping with the appointment of a new chief of staff. He said he was crystal clear about that in the article, including that when he was helping to find a replacement, he would have remembered any allegation, he said, and he said his mind was not fuzzy at all about that.

There was another investigation related to NATO, and Richard Fadden and I think the outgoing chief of staff mentioned it, but not the Gagetown one, and as I said, I don't want to go into any of this, but I will say to those members of the committee who honestly want to go into this, who want to know "who, what and where", that this is a much more serious allegation.

Megan Mackenzie, an expert on sexual misconduct in the military at Simon Fraser University, said that no one handled it well, but if the investigation was still open or any investigation was still open, then why did cabinet appoint General Vance? Then the military police recommended an end to an investigation, apparently on July 17, the day that General Vance was sworn in, and then four days later it was closed. How did that process evolve on those dates?

• (1705)

I'm sure that things are still evolving as people are researching this. As I said, if we have to go into how, when, why, and where, these are much more serious allegations and would have to be dealt

with. That's not my interest. My interest is in helping the women in the military, going back to recommendations that would change the culture and the fear of reporting.

There are so many incidents. Rather than spending time on these one or two instances and one or two individuals, we should get on with the major, substantial structural problem. Even though there are hundreds and probably thousands of incidents, an incident affects people for the rest of their lives. It's not just a momentary incident.

That's why we have to put all this aside and get down to recommendations to solve those three problems so that people never again fear to choose a great career in the military with the great honour of protecting us as citizens. If they make a report of something inappropriate, they should not worry that it's going to affect the career they've invested their lives in. We should not allow that to occur because of a culture that is accepted and has occurred not only in our military but, as Mr. Spengemann has pointed out, in militaries around the world.

I think there are people on the committee who have the ability to deal with those problems and get on with them and come up with some very good recommendations. That would be my preference at this time, but I'll leave that up to the committee.

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

We'll go to Mr. Spengemann and then Ms. Sidhu.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Madam Chair, thank you very much.

I'd like to thank both my colleagues immediately preceding me, Mr. Baker and Mr. Bagnell, for their interventions.

The human dimension of this is front and centre. It ranks top of mind. It makes this an issue that we simply need to tackle. The expectations could not be higher, and we need to move forward and bring a report that will make a difference, that will change the Canadian Armed Forces structurally.

Mr. Baker made reference to the experience that we see elsewhere in the world. In previous interventions a few weeks ago, I had a chance to introduce some of these considerations and experiences. I introduced them, Madam Chair, because this is really an addition to the substance of these experiences, which is helpful to the committee as we now very rapidly approach the deadline in our time frame for consideration of this report, as proposed by the motion, which in fact is next week. I'm hoping that the committee will take a different path and will allow for more incubation of these issues and more impactful recommendations before we break for the summer recess.

I raise these considerations from other countries—and they include South Africa, the U.K., Sweden, Australia—in addition to institutional work that was done by NATO and by institutions like the Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, as it was then known in Geneva.

The fact that there's such a great incident rate in so many countries around the world with militaries that are similar to ours in structure, orientation, expertise, vision and training really underscores the structural, systemic nature of the issue that we're facing. It simply isn't limited to the cases, however many we have here in Canada and as disturbing as that is. Unless we change the structure, it is a recipe for the generation of additional cases and additional victims.

That is one part of the consideration for why these comparative experiences from other countries are so important and why we actually should work together with militaries elsewhere and share our expertise and share our story, as the the United Kingdom has done. I raise that as one example that's particularly salient.

The Wigston report, which was put together by Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Wigston, conducted a thorough review in 2019. The advantage that we have from the U.K. experience is that the very next year, in 2020, they published a progress report on unacceptable behaviour. Therefore, not only did they get out front of the issue in considerable detail and with recommendations that are impactful and, in my submission, to some extent replicable and emulatable here in Canada, but they also did the follow-up work to see if the recommendations worked. It has actually harnessed, in the very short term, the reaction within the British Armed Forces and the British public.

One of the key considerations that's before the committee and in all of the interventions of my colleagues across party lines is the question of trust within the Canadian Armed Forces, trust by serving members and former serving members, and the trust that victims should have in coming forward in voicing concerns and making complaints. On this level, I think the U.K. experience is helpful, and I'm going to put forward to the committee for consideration some of the thoughts that relate to the question of trust, particularly with respect to the chain of command that's been subject to the discussion today and is relevant to the motion.

The chain of command really is a fundamental structural obstacle with respect to the resolution of sexual misconduct cases, and the U.K. really took this issue seriously, acknowledged it and came up with, I believe—

• (1710)

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

We heard this in a previous filibuster, this exact same report. I'm wondering what the relevance is with respect to this motion that we're debating. He's putting out more evidence—or repeating, more accurately—the evidence we heard during the filibuster.

Could he speak to the actual motion that is before us, as opposed to debating something that is not before us?

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gallant.

Carry on, Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Madam Chair, thank you very much for the point of order. Let me just respond briefly.

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: It's well and good, procedurally, that the Conservatives have put forward what they would like to discuss in the form of a motion. They also seek to shut down debate within this committee on this report within a week and a half, and I believe there are very fundamental considerations.

Other countries have done the work that this committee has not yet done. Therefore, I'm going to take time to put those considerations before this committee in an expedited fashion to make sure that if we don't do the work ourselves, we at least have in front of us the experience of those countries that have done this work and are making progress. I would urge you, Madam Chair, to rule that this is directly relevant to the motion. The Conservatives may wish to discuss their preferred outcome of the motion; I'm going to put to the committee what I believe are the fundamental considerations that we need to engage in within the very short time frame we have.

With that, Madam Chair, Air Chief Marshal Wigston concluded in his findings on the question of trust. Trust, as I said a minute ago, is front and centre in every consideration with respect to this issue. There's a breakdown of trust that's been acknowledged by the minister, by the Prime Minister, by witnesses and, I believe, in large part, by every member of this committee. We're dealing with the fundamental breakdown of trust on the issue of systemic challenges with respect to sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces.

The United Kingdom—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: On a point of order, Madam Chair, this report has already been read out to the committee—

Mr. Sven Spengemann: It has not, Madam Gallant. It has not.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: They have to put out new information. As for the Wigston report, perhaps he wasn't here that day, but we heard the whole Wigston report. It was recited to us over hours.

The Chair: I don't think I did. Maybe—

Go ahead, Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Madam Chair, if I may respond, I've kept very careful tabs on my document in terms of where I left off last time. As I said, this report is extensive but illuminating. There is also a follow-on report that outlines progress in 2020. The Wigston report section that I'm referring to now is with respect to trust and specifically what other stakeholders think of governance structures and concerns within the British Armed Forces. That is information I have not put to the committee in previous interventions, and I will now proceed to do so, with your indulgence, Madam Chair—

• (1715)

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: This motion before us is requesting that Zita Astravas come before us. Did Zita go before the committee in the U.K. as a witness on the Wigston report?

The Chair: On the—

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Madam Chair, the Conservatives may wish to discuss what's in their motion. I'm going to refer the committee to what I think we should be doing instead of shutting down this process on May 28, as the motion proposes. There are serious gaps and considerations with respect to trust that come from other countries with helpful evidence, helpful research and helpful conclusions that I believe the committee needs to hear.

If we're not having the discussions among ourselves, as we should, I will put some of these considerations forward. They will be helpful to what we should be putting into this report and what Canadian Forces members and the Canadian public really expect us to be doing.

We often look to our friends and allies within the Five Eyes and other jurisdictions. In this case, the United Kingdom has done some very substantial, progressive and quick work on this very issue that is before the committee today.

The report states:

There is a notable perception among external stakeholders that trust in the system [in the United Kingdom] is not as strong as it used to be; over half of the external stakeholders consulted, without prompting, alluded to this sentiment. Some of them considered that units are sweeping issues under the carpet through a 'protect the cap badge' mentality, and for presentational reasons, up to the organisational chain of command.

It requires no further thought to see how relevant these insights are to our considerations here in Canada.

It goes on:

Support organisations suggest more requests for help are being lodged externally rather than through internal support channels, partly due to the association of these organisations with the chain of command, but also as a last resort when the chain of command has failed them. In many cases it was reported to us that victims are afraid to report an issue as they do not believe they will be understood or taken seriously. Cultural differentials play strongly into this space; the chain of command is not normally culturally representative of those under their command, and so people fear—or experience—unconscious bias through issues being considered in a manner which lacks empathy or understanding of the significance of a situation to the person.

Madam Chair, it's a very detailed and human approach by the United Kingdom that's directly relevant to what we should be considering here today.

We've talked at length over sessions of testimony about confidence in the system and the willingness to come forward. In the United Kingdom, the report states:

We heard repeated suggestions of Service people not reporting inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour because of a fear of the consequences of doing so. Similarly, military culture and a rigid hierarchy inhibits bystander intervention and the ability of lower ranks to challenge the behaviours of their seniors. Such fears include the impact on their career prospects; being perceived as a trouble-maker; the issue being placed on their career record; potential consequences on career and home life; the potential that stepping forward would aggravate the situation; a fear of not fitting in; segregation and no longer being treated as a member of the group; not being believed; their concern not being taken seriously; and the chain of command at every level lacking the time to do anything with the issue. Many simply consider that reporting inappropriate behaviour to their chain of command would get them nowhere, a pattern which the Service Complaints Ombudsman has also recognised. The net result suggests a sense of helplessness among some of our people, who either keep quiet or turn to a fully anonymous external service for help.

On the service complaints system in the United Kingdom, the report states:

The 2018 report from the Service Complaints Ombudsman noted the majority of users who did make a Service Complaint were dissatisfied with the time taken to resolve the complaint, and three-quarters considered they had suffered negative consequences as a result of pursuing a formal complaint. Across the Services, only 50% of Service Complaints were closed within the 24-week target, falling significantly short of the 90% target; on average it is currently taking 53 weeks to resolve a bullying, harassment or discrimination Service Complaint

This is in the United Kingdom.

It goes on:

External stakeholders told us our people have lost faith in the Service Complaints system. It is perceived to lack independence from the chain of command at every level, and many of our stakeholders question its ability to be impartial or for people to use it without attracting negative consequences. The Service Complaints Ombudsman has noted in successive annual reports, "...the lack of confidence in the system also continues to be a key issue...and one which requires considerable focus and attention if we are ever to achieve an efficient, effective and fair system."

● (1720)

The view of the external stakeholder community as reported to us is consistent and clear - the creation of a complaints organisation which allows for anonymous reporting and support for people affected, and external to the Armed Forces would allow people the freedom to make a complaint without the fear of reprisal. We return to this point in Part 3 of the Report.

Sir Michael Wigston goes on. The observation, in this case, was that:

External stakeholders highlight shortcomings in how Defence deals with instances of inappropriate behaviour, the efficacy of the current Service Complaints system especially.

The report then goes to questions of mandatory training within the armed forces. It states the following:

All Services deliver mandated training on diversity, inclusion and values; it is often delivered within a tight timescale and can, in some areas, focus on compliance rather than behaviours and cultural change.

This is directly relevant to Canada, Madam Chair, in the sense that recommendations may well include recommendations for increased training within the Canadian Armed Forces. The British experience tells us what the constraints and shortfalls of such training initiatives may be and how they may be adapted to better serve the purpose of achieving true culture change.

Senior Officers...must attend a one-day course every three years. Feedback from the Defence Academy indicates that the Senior Officer courses are often under subscribed, due to frequent last-minute drop outs and pressure on diaries.

They make a recommendation as follows:

Mandated diversity, inclusion and values training must be prioritised [in the British armed forces], irrespective of rank.

Then, Madam Chair, if you'll indulge me, with respect to additional training in the British Armed Forces, the report says:

...the Armed Forces deliver sessions on behaviours, ethics, culture and inclusion within their command courses, usually during leadership modules. In the best cases, the training becomes more interactive with scenario-based role-play, which carries more impact and is much better received than formal presentations or online training. The Naval Service training approach already reflects significantly greater emphasis on cultural change rather than compliance; the Royal Air Force have similarly implemented behaviours and perceptions workshops for military and civilian personnel. Army analysis also recognises the value of peer-based discursive learning; subject-specific training interventions include: sexual behaviours training by military police; and novel approaches such as 'Dilemma' and 'Respect for Others' scenario-based training delivered in partnership with trained facilitators. Immersive training approaches such as these are engaging, effective and recognised leading practice. All indications are positive, however there is no established pan-Defence process for measuring the impact of these [training] programmes. There is also a pressing need for training interventions aimed specifically to address the overrepresentation of minority groups, women and junior ranks in the complaints process.

The British Armed Forces report makes three recommendations related to training. They are as follows:

Maximise use of immersive values-based training across Defence.

Defence should investigate causes of overrepresentation of minority groups, women and junior ranks in the complaints process and implement the necessary training interventions as part of an overarching strategy to address the issue.

Defence should develop a process for measuring the impact of culture and behaviours training programmes.

Madam Chair, these are just a few passages from an important section of the report that speaks to trust. Often the reflex on the part of committees such as ours might be to recommend increased training. We need the granularity to figure out what kinds of training programs really are effective in changing the culture, how they are going to be received and how they are going to be evaluated.

In this short intervention, Madam Chair, this is one issue that I wanted to put to the committee for consideration in the recommendations that we hopefully will have the time to elaborate upon in some detail. I'll come back with further thoughts a bit later on, but will leave it there for now.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

We move on to Madam Sidhu, please.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is important for me to speak today. As a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, I know how serious the issue we are discussing here is.

Here's the main point: I believe we have to go above politics here and focus on survivors. I'm disappointed to see the politicization of this issue. It's so hurtful, Madam Chair.

• (1725)

The Chair: Just a minute, please, Madame Sidhu. The interpreters are having a bit of trouble hearing you correctly.

Perhaps you could raise your microphone so that it's beside your nose.

Go ahead and try that again, please.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you, Madam Chair, for giving me the opportunity.

It is so important for me to speak today. As a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, I know how serious this issue is that we're discussing here today.

Here's the main point: I believe we have to go above politics here and focus on survivors. I'm disappointed to see the politicization of this issue. It is so hurtful, Madam Chair.

Since March we have been conducting our own study on the same issue, following up on another study that we conducted in 2019. So far we have had eight meetings and heard from 36 witnesses, including the Minister of National Defence, Justice Deschamps, senior CF officials, law enforcement and over a dozen survivors of sexual assault in the military.

These stories have been difficult to listen to, and I heartily commend all the survivors for coming forward. Having heard from the witnesses in FEWO, I agree that we need to work with the witnesses and work with the survivors, not play politics. Madam Chair, let me be clear: The survivors need solutions, not politics.

First I want to focus on the solution, Madam Chair. I have been encouraged by the amount of political will shown by the government, including the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence, and my friend the parliamentary secretary, who joined us in these meetings in FEWO in their sincere commitment to reform the culture of the armed forces and to better support survivors.

When the minister appeared on March 23, he acknowledged that a great deal of work needs to be done. He said:

Sexual misconduct, harassment and inappropriate behaviour are not acceptable. We must call them out for what they are: an abuse of power. Such behaviour is contrary to our values as Canadians and harmful to the Canadian Forces operational effectiveness. We want to prevent it. We want to be there for survivors and their support networks. We want to ensure that those who come forward feel safe, supported and confident that they will be heard when they report sexual misconduct and harassment.

There is obviously more work to be done, but the government has taken several key steps to ending sexual misconduct in the armed forces as part of Operation Honour. We have passed a declaration of victims' rights, created the sexual misconduct response centre, and the government is implementing the Path to Dignity and Respect, a strategy for long-term culture change to eliminate sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces.

Following this, the Government of Canada initiated an independent external comprehensive review led by former Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour. This review will look into harassment and sexual misconduct in the CF and will examine policies, procedures, programs, practices and culture within national defence and make recommendations for improvement.

The minister said:

Eliminating all forms of misconduct and abuse of power and creating a safe work environment for everyone in the defence team has always been a top priority for me as Minister of National Defence. However, recent media reports show that many members of the Canadian Armed Forces still do not feel safe to come forward. We know we must do more to make sure that every Canadian Armed Forces member feels safe to come forward and that we will be ready to support them when they do.

He went on to say:

Beyond the SMRC, members can also reach out to chaplain services, military family resource centres, the employee assistance program and the family information line....

and continued:

These resources are critical to supporting those affected by sexual misconduct, but they are just part of our larger efforts to build a safe and inclusive workplace for all members of our defence team. We're working to eliminate the toxic masculinity that forms part of our military culture and keeps us from moving forward, the outdated and toxic traditions that valorize toughness and aggression over emotional intelligence and co-operation, and any part of our culture that contributes to bullying, harassment and other inappropriate behaviours.

In our committee we made a conscious choice to keep the study survivor-centric. We recognized that we are not investigators, and it is not our place to risk interfering in investigations. The goal was not to look backward and find out who knew what and when, although all of those questions have been repeatedly and clearly answered in this committee. As a legislative committee, the goal was to make recommendations that would improve conditions for women in the Canadian Armed Forces going forward.

• (1730)

It was encouraging to hear that work has already begun on this issue. When I asked Lieutenant-General Wayne Eyre, he said he had spoken directly to survivors in the short time since he became the acting chief of the defence staff. He said that many had reached out to him and that he had carefully listened to their stories. He said the following:

One thing that is apparent to me is that we need to bring in some mechanism whereby survivors can achieve closure, perhaps where they don't necessarily want to follow a legal process. I am very keen to learn more and to see the wider restorative engagement efforts as part of a final settlement coming and perhaps as a learning opportunity to bring in some form of reconciliation process. There's much more to learn here.

Madam Chair, once again, the issue we're discussing is heart-breaking. We have to be asking questions. How can we help the survivors? As I've heard from my colleagues today, these questions are being asked by some members on the committee. I encourage everyone to focus on survivors and culture change in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

We will go on to Mr. Baker, and then Ms. Vandenberg.

Go ahead, Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank Madame Sidhu, who joined us today. I think her subbing in was very timely because, as you pointed out, she was able to share with us some of the comments and some of the learning she and other members have acquired from her parliamentary

work on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. I think that is very valuable.

It reminds us of why it's important to get to the report and focus our time on the report at this committee, which is why I believe the motion before us, which we're debating at the moment, needs to be withdrawn, or if it's not withdrawn, it needs to be defeated, to be voted against. I'm still hopeful it will be withdrawn.

I think the focus here should be on victims. One thing that Mr. Spengemann did, I thought, in his intervention, was speak about the Wigston report and some of the findings from that report that we can learn from and that we can apply to our report here.

One person who came before us was Madame Deschamps. She has done a tremendous amount of work on the issue of sexual misconduct in the military and she issued a report several years ago.

One thing she writes about in her report is under-reporting. I want to share with you some of the findings from that. They remind us of the kinds of things we need to include in our report and the kinds of recommendations we need to be prioritizing in our committee's report, as well as why we need to defeat this motion or why it needs to be withdrawn.

She writes in her report:

The CAF has, until now, failed to acknowledge the extent and pervasiveness of the problem of inappropriate sexual conduct. This may be the result of the very low number of complaints that are reported every year. In 2012, for example, a representative of the [Canadian Armed Forces] testified before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women that the [Canadian Armed Forces] Harassment Tracking System had recorded, for the ten-year period beginning in 2002, only 31 complaints of sexual harassment, of which 11 were founded or partially founded. Further, as noted, the JAG reported that only nine charges of sexual assault had been brought before Court Martial in the year 2011-2012. These statistics do not, however, take into account the likelihood of under-reporting, and create a misleading picture of the problem. This, in turn, has had the consequence of shifting attention in the [Canadian Armed Forces] away from the problem of inappropriate sexual conduct and its impact on the organization. Indeed, in releasing the results of the 2012 Canadian Forces Workplace Harassment Survey, the Director General of Military Personnel, Research and Analysis recommended "that attention be placed on addressing *personal* harassment and abuse of authority in the CAF", rather than on *sexual* harassment, given the low rate of sexual harassment reported in the survey.

Here Madame Deschamps is writing about how senior leaders in the CAF have identified other issues, in this case abuse of authority, which they see as a priority over the issue of sexual harassment.

It continues:

Although the ERA was not asked to conduct surveys and obtain comparable data, the consistent evidence of inappropriate sexual conduct heard [through] the consultations strongly suggests that a much higher level of incidents occur, particularly of sexual harassment. The ERA can only conclude that there is a very serious problem of under-reporting in the CAF. Indeed, the problem of under-reporting was itself raised by numerous contributors and, as discussed in greater detail below, the ERA heard repeatedly throughout its consultations that victims of both sexual harassment and sexual assault fail to report such incidents for a variety of reasons.

The failure to report both sexual harassment and sexual assault is not specific to the [Canadian Armed Forces]. ...it is well-documented in other military organizations and more broadly in civilian life. Many of the reasons why CAF members are reluctant to report such incidents, however, appear to be connected to certain cultural norms, some of which have already been described. In particular, participants reported concerns about negative consequences for the complainant's career, loss of privacy and confidentiality, fear of collateral charges, and a deep scepticism that the chain of command would respond sensitively and appropriately to the complaint. Yet without information about what is occurring on the ground, the CAF is unable to make necessary changes to reduce inappropriate sexual conduct. Improving the rate of reporting is therefore crucial if senior leaders are to understand how policies are implemented and where they need to be improved. Under-reporting is a reality that needs to be understood and addressed if a change of culture and reduction of incidents is to be achieved.

● (1735)

In this particular segment, Madame Deschamps obviously is writing about under-reporting. One thing that I want to highlight out of the segment is the reasons that victims don't report. She highlights that when she says the following:

...participants reported concerns about negative consequences for the complainant's career, loss of privacy and confidentiality, fear of collateral charges, and a deep scepticism that the chain of command would respond sensitively and appropriately to the complaint.

Here we have one of the challenges. This is not the first time we've heard about it at this committee during this study. We have to make sure that there's a process that builds up trust to ensure that victims or complainants can bring forward those allegations and not face some of these negative consequences. I think this is one of the things we've heard about at committee.

I highlight it here because I think it's important. We need to be able to tackle this. This is one of the problems we need to be able to tackle to address sexual harassment and assault in the armed forces. That's why I believe this motion needs to be withdrawn. It focuses our attention on more of the political game-playing instead of tackling some of the problems that need to be tackled to address this problem, like the one that I just highlighted, the under-reporting that Madame Deschamps wrote extensively about in her report.

There's another thing I want to bring to the committee's attention. That's the further testimony at FEWO, the committee on the status of women, by a witness named Julie Lalonde. She was asked about PTSD among MST survivors. Julie Lalonde said:

I can tell you that the highest rate of post-traumatic stress disorder worldwide is among victims of rape and sexual violence. The second-highest rate is in the military. We urgently need to take this seriously.

Trauma shouldn't be organized into a hierarchy. When their trauma isn't considered equivalent to the trauma caused by war, victims of sexual violence don't receive the support that they deserve. That's unacceptable.

I highlight this because when I hear testimony like this, it's a reminder of how much is at stake in this study. When you hear about the rates of PTSD among victims of rape and sexual violence, how can we not focus our attention on that? There are Canadian members of the armed forces who have served our country and are serving our country who are struggling with this. Some of them, I presume, are following this committee. Some of them may be watching today. How do we defend passing this motion and then spending most of the next five weeks playing further political games—calling witnesses again to answer questions we've already heard the answers to and scoring political points to grab a headline—when this is happening? It's happening on our watch. I think we can con-

tribute to solving it, and I wanted to highlight that testimony as a reminder of what's at stake.

Another piece of testimony that I think is relevant to hear is what we heard from Mr. Okros. Mr. Okros came to this committee, but he also presented to the committee on the status of women. He was asked a question about the urgency of taking action. He said the following:

This is urgent. We have people who are still hurting. We have members internally within the military. It's been stated. They have lost trust. That needs to be rebuilt with urgency. Canadians need to have confidence in their military. They need to have confidence that when particularly young women, young men and people of diverse identities choose to serve Canada in uniform, they will be treated with respect and have good, full, meaningful careers. That needs to be something that is communicated effectively.

● (1740)

Mr. Okros—whom we all heard from during this study, so we all know him and his credentials—says, “We have people who are hurting. We have members internally within the military hurting,” so these folks are hurting. I don't know, to me.... Folks like my colleagues on this committee, people—Canadians—are hurting. Members of the armed forces are hurting. We're hearing this from victims like Christine Wood, whom I spoke about earlier, but we're hearing from experts like Mr. Okros. He's not alone. They're hurting, and we're not going to dedicate our time to relieving that hurt?

I don't know how to even explain to someone how we're not going to do that. Why wouldn't we do what we could? Why wouldn't we contribute to that outcome to help relieve the pain that people are feeling?

He goes on to say, “It's been stated. They have lost trust. That needs to be rebuilt with urgency.” On the issue of trust, we've heard extensively, not just from Mr. Okros but from others, that many have lost trust. I think virtually every member of this committee has spoken to that issue here. Other members of the forces, and certainly those people who are victims and want to bring forward allegations, have lost trust.

Let's start doing things. Let's put in place the processes to rebuild that trust. That's not something that happens overnight, but Mr. Okros was talking about how this has to be done with urgency. We heard that from him. We're hearing that from others. To my colleagues on the committee, why wouldn't we show that urgency? As elected officials in this Parliament, we know more about the issue of sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Canadian Armed Forces than I would suspect most elected officials do. Certainly we're among the most knowledgeable of the elected officials in this Parliament and probably prior parliaments. People are looking to us to show leadership on this. It's urgent to rebuild that trust.

This motion basically says we're going to set solving this problem aside to be able to call witnesses we've called before, ask questions we've asked before and hear answers we've heard before. Really? I mean, let's respond to these calls for urgent action.

I get that this committee isn't going to solve this alone, but this committee is here to contribute. If we can even contribute a little bit, that's worth it. That's worth it.

Anyway, I'll go on to the next portion of what Mr. Okros said:

Canadians need to have confidence...that when particularly young women, young men, and people of diverse identities choose to serve Canada in uniform, they will be treated with respect and have good, full, meaningful careers.

When I think about Canada, one of the things I think is great about Canada is our diversity, with people of different backgrounds, different expertise and different ages. The Canadian Armed Forces, and we've heard this... I think all members of this committee would agree that ensuring that the Canadian Armed Forces can attract people of diverse backgrounds—men and women of diverse backgrounds, expertise and points of view, from different parts of Canada—is really vital to making sure that we have strong armed forces, because you need to have the best and the brightest. Only by attracting folks from all corners of society can you do that. We've heard that, and I think most members of the committee would agree with that.

● (1745)

What strikes me most about that testimony about the need to be able to attract and retain young women and young men of diverse identities is the fact that Canada is so diverse. It's one of our strengths, but the current situation, the problem we have yet to solve around how members of the forces are treated around sexual assault and sexual misconduct of any kind, is preventing that from happening. By not acting on this, by not acting on these warnings from Mr. Okros and others, by not attracting that diversity, we're not going to have the strongest armed forces we could have.

This committee, therefore, by not acting on that and by prioritizing its time for political game playing, as proposed in this motion—which proposes that we spend all our time on things that lead to politics and finger-pointing rather than on actually writing the report, which is how we make a difference—is taking away an opportunity to strengthen the Canadian Armed Forces, the very armed forces that we laud, that we talk about needing to be strengthened.

I just think it's too bad that this motion before us was introduced. I urge the members of the committee to withdraw this motion. If the member who introduced it, Mr. Bezan, is not going to withdraw it, then I'd urge the members of this committee to vote against it.

[*Translation*]

Earlier, I read your remarks made by Christine Wood when she appeared before another committee.

Now, I'd like to read another very important statement, survivor Emily Tulloch's. It's not that long. Here goes:

I joined the Canadian Armed Forces in July of 2018. Since then, I feel like I've experienced a lifetime's worth of sexual assault and misconduct. I'm here today to tell you that I was raped only one month—one month—into my basic training in Saint-Jean. I was also sexually assaulted during my training in Borden. I have been groped and kissed unwillingly at crew parties and mess events. These degrading behaviours are more common than you think.

On top of all that, I have put up with misogynistic and sexist comments all throughout my career. They range from being told that I only got in because I'm a girl to what an instructor in Borden said to me while looking me dead in the eye: If you've had daddy fix everything for you in your cozy little life, let us know so we can give you a hand.

I believe in the importance of the military. I hope to continue my career and to serve my country to the best of my abilities. My experience with our military justice system, however, has been quite negative. It has left me with a lot of questions about how military police should conduct their investigations. I had three interviews with the military police since I first reported misconduct. Two of those interviews were honestly dreadful. These so-called interviews felt more like interrogation. During these interviews, I felt that investigators were not treating me like a human being. I was just another case file to them. There was no empathy or humanity. It was so frustrating that I left early during the second interview. I felt like I wasn't being heard and was being treated like a criminal. No one should be treated like a criminal when they are that vulnerable and in need of help.

● (1750)

The military police need to improve their training for how to conduct interviews of sexual assault victims. There needs to be a specific course made to teach them that victims need understanding and empathy. If there already is a course, then they need to tear it apart and rebuild it from the ground up.

I also believe that an officer of the same sex of the victim should conduct the interview. In my situation, it wasn't offered that I could speak to a female officer until halfway through my interview, when I started crying. Even then the military police said they would have to reschedule for the next week, because there was no female officer available.

In basic training the leadership tries to ingrain the core values of the military in recruits. These values are duty, loyalty, integrity and courage. These values are taught through PowerPoint and workbooks. However, these values are falling through the cracks. That is how we get this toxic culture that we have been dealing with for so long. It has been abundantly clear that military leadership has not been able to uphold the high ethical standards of integrity. If the leadership can't follow basic core values and set a good example, how are the majority of troops supposed to?

In basic training we are shown this cartoon video that oversimplifies the concept of consent. In my view, the video is little more than a joke. It's all fun to watch, but the topic of sexual misconduct isn't fun. It should be uncomfortable enough to realize that this is a real issue that needs to be dealt with.

I read that statement because it really had an impact on me. It reminds us why we have to help people like Ms. Tulloch. She had the courage to come before a parliamentary committee to tell her story and describe just how much she and some of her fellow members were suffering. She begins her statement by saying, "I joined the Canadian Armed Forces in July of 2018. Since then, I feel like I've experienced a lifetime's worth of sexual assault and misconduct."

Can we not help Ms. Tulloch, or at least try to, instead of spending the next five weeks asking the same questions of witnesses we have already met with, just to hear the same answers, all in an effort to make a political party look bad? Should that really be our priority after hearing a statement like that?

She states, "I'm here today to tell you that I was raped only one month—one month—into my basic training in Saint-Jean." Is this really how we want to respond to something like that?

It can't be. Let's focus on the problem Emily Tulloch brought to our attention. I read you what she said. She described precisely the problem we should be fixing, and to do that, we need to draft a report.

• (1755)

We have to tell Canadians what we have heard these past four months. I can't remember when exactly we began studying this, but it has been months. That is what we should do. We became members of Parliament to help people, to help our constituents.

What are we going to tell Ms. Tulloch and Ms. Wood? What are we going to say to them five weeks from now? That we spent another chunk of time playing politics and only a bit of time working on a rushed report? Is that our priority?

We should be showing leadership on this issue. In Parliament, we are the ones who know the most about the issue. We have spent four months working on it. It is unbelievable that we are discussing a motion that will not prioritize Ms. Tulloch or Ms. Wood. I can't wrap my head around it.

I beseech the committee members to vote against this motion, to support victims and to address the issue in hand. The issue is not about figuring out what one official told another official or hearing from the same people for the 10th or 20th time. That is not how we will fix the problems Ms. Tulloch and Ms. Wood have described. We will fix them by spending our meeting time working together and writing a report.

I urge you to listen to their testimony, to think about them and to vote against this motion.

[*English*]

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

We go to you, Madam Vandenberg.

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

I really do appreciate a number of my colleagues' interventions. Particularly, I can see the authenticity and the emotion. I'm very pleased that we had Ms. Sidhu join us. She has sat in on many of the hearings in the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. I had the privilege of subbing in to those. We heard some of the very heart-wrenching testimony from the survivors.

There are a couple of things I'd like to say about the motion that is before us. Then I'd like to continue a little bit along the same vein as some of my colleagues.

I'm looking at this motion from the perspective of somebody who has been affected and impacted by sexual trauma, sexual misconduct, violence and harassment in the military. I can't imagine and I have no way myself of knowing....

I know that every person is different and that it's not a homogeneous group. I know that I'm not speaking for any of the survivors, but I do think that in general, when looking at what we can do as parliamentarians—

• (1800)

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, Madame Vandenberg, but the clerk just brought to my attention that it's six o'clock, and we lose our House resources at six o'clock.

There is a motion to adjourn. All those in favour—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: No, no, I don't think Mr. Bezan wanted... He wanted to get his motion voted upon.

I might also correct the record. It was Ms. Vandenberg in a previous meeting who set the date of May 28 as being the deadline for this. I believe it was meeting 24. That was alleged to have happened. Somebody accused the Conservatives of doing that, but it was the parliamentary secretary, the extension of the executive.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I do recall that it was the vote and will of the committee.

I'm concerned about the lack of resources. If the interpreters are leaving, I don't know that....

Madam Chair, I think it needs to be your call.

The Chair: All right.

Did anyone else want to speak to this?

The meeting is adjourned.

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