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Chair: Mr. Pat Kelly



Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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• (1545)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 37 of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics of the House of Commons.

[English]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely, using the Zoom application.

The committee is meeting at the request of members who signed and delivered to the clerk a letter pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), and we are here to discuss the request to undertake a study on the use of public funds in relation to the Roxham Road crossing.

I understand that earlier today, Monsieur Villemure supplied the clerk with the wording of a motion that he would like to move pursuant to the request for a meeting on this topic.

I will give you the floor, René. I ask you for your remarks, or to move the motion if you are planning to do so.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to present the following motion further to the notice:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)h), the committee undertake, as soon as possible, a study to assess the ethical standards relating to public office holders related to the awarding of contracts for the reception of refugees and the development of infrastructure to receive asylum seekers in the province of Quebec; that the Committee allocate a minimum of 6 meetings to conduct this study; the committee invite the Ministers of Immigration and Public Safety, representatives of the RCMP, Public Services and Procurement Canada including Teresa Maioni and Lyne Roy, respectively responsible and coordinator of Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP), officials of the Canada Border Services Agency including Dan Proulx, Executive Director and Chief Privacy Officer, and Mr. Pierre Guay.

All committee members have received a copy of the motion.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. We had notice of the motion in advance, and it is in order.

So far, I have Ya'ara and Iqra to speak. Members can wave if they want the floor, and I can maintain a list.

Go ahead, Ms. Saks. You have the floor.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to colleagues for today.

I want to thank Monsieur Villemure for putting forward this motion. However, he raised this in the House some time ago. It was December 14, if I'm not mistaken, when he asked his question in the House with regard to Roxham Road. It has been quite a bit of time. We're at nearly a year since that first question in the House was raised by Monsieur Villemure.

I don't disagree with him: The issue of refugees and asylum seekers.... as Canadians, we proudly make space for those who need refuge here in Canada. It is an issue of concern for many Canadians, including me, that they have safe passage and safe access in ways that both protect them and make sure our border services are doing the job they need to do.

From December until now...it seems like quite a bit of time has passed since first raising that question. There has been a lot of good work done in committee since I've joined it, including the recent facial recognition technology report we did, which was a request put forward by the NDP. I was happy to support that study, because it was an important issue. We've explored many important issues here, and I'm just trying to understand the urgency that Monsieur Villemure is seeing at this moment in time.

Nothing has changed in Roxham Road in the last 10 months or so. The property is the same property. The set-up to assist asylum seekers has been the same set-up all this time. The variables haven't really changed from when he first raised the question in the House last December until now.

We have a lot of important work to do here. We've made space for important work and other studies. I've enjoyed my time in these studies. I'm just trying to ensure that the work of this committee that we've committed to in our work plans and the questions that we need to ask are really the ones that we're putting forward and the studies that we're planning to do.

That's the first part of what I'd like to clarify with Monsieur Villemure, but also, what is it that we're asking about here? Are we looking at the issue of Roxham Road itself as a point of entry and its continued use as a point of entry? It is one of the safest points of entry for many asylum seekers, as opposed to some of the horrific stories we've heard at crossing points in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the dead of winter, which have been heartbreaking stories of those who are seeking safe haven here.

If it's a matter of the point of entry at Roxham Road, and if those are questions about how it's managed and how that's being done, then I'm not really sure that this is the place, that we should be exploring it at ethics. That's really an immigration question, and I think there are important questions that we should be asking there in the management of points of entry for asylum seekers.

However, I'm really unclear as to—if none of the variables have changed from his question in December until now, and looking at the importance of having these points of entry like Roxham Road—why we're entertaining these questions here. I'm really unclear as to what we're trying to get at in entertaining a study of six meetings in the middle of our own work plan. I just want to make sure that our time here is used well and wisely, and that we're really getting to the heart of the questions that need to be addressed in this committee.

I thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to share my comments. I will pass the floor back to you.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Khalid, you're next. Go ahead.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. I appreciate it. I'm going to continue a bit on what my colleague, Ms. Saks, was referring to.

We've been sitting here with opposition parties for about a year now. We've engaged on some really important questions. We've put forward motions that I think are really important to study and we have done them. We had the FRT study, which the NDP proposed and we completed. We had the mobility study, which the Conservatives proposed and we completed. We had the RCMP study, which the Bloc proposed, and it's completed.

We've been waiting about three years now to get one of our studies started. I realize that the ATIP study, which was up next, was proposed by the Conservatives. I'm happy to get that done.

Calling a 106(4) when we've had ample opportunity to have discussions, to put this on the list, to actually do the job of this committee, whether it's to hold government to account or to ensure that the public is well aware of what we're doing.... I think we could have handled this situation a bit better.

On the second point of Ms. Saks, with respect to the scope of what this motion presents, in the letter, it is kind of all over. Are we looking at whether this is an immigration issue or a public safety issue, or we are looking to see what the general procurement process is? We need to have those conversations. We need to engage with each other.

I have noticed over the past months and months that I, or we, have put in an effort to make sure we're having those conversations. We want better government. We're sitting at the table and we want to engage with you folks. It is very strange to me that you, members of the opposition, got together and had your substantive discussions and put together a letter, and now we're sitting here in a 106(4) situation when we could have just included this as part of our study agenda for the year.

It's not uncommon. Obviously it is the way that the odd committee has operated. We talk about being open and transparent. We talk about holding government to account. Well, the opposition has a responsibility to do that too, folks. We're here; we're ready to engage and we would love for you guys to engage right back and have those important conversations.

I absolutely agree that we need to have these questions put on the table. We need to ask these questions. We need to have the study, absolutely. However, to Ms. Saks' point, what is the urgency right now? Why are we doing this at this given time? Why could we not have, in an open discussion, put this within the framework of what we're doing for the year?

I personally have two motions on notice and I'd like to get those on the agenda too. I'm willing to work with you guys to see how we can push forward these issues. I want to have those conversations. I want to be included in the conversations that you guys have with each other. It would be nice to work together. We talk about open and transparent government, and I would love to see an open and transparent opposition also and see how we can bring it all home.

I have some specific amendments that I want to propose, but perhaps I'll cede the floor to other speakers to get their initial thoughts in first.

Thanks, Chair.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

Next I have Mr. Bezan.

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

I appreciate the comments from Ms. Khalid and Ms. Saks, and I want to thank Mr. Villemure for bringing forward this motion. I think it is an important motion.

We want to make sure the study is very tight in how we approach it. We don't want to be crossing over into the mandates of other committees. The issues around the contracts and immigration are things that will be dealt with by other committees if they so choose. This is very specific about the ethical behaviour of public office holders and how those contracts were awarded. That's what we're going to be digging into here.

I think what Mr. Villemure has brought forward is very succinct. As a committee, we have been very successful, for the most part, in getting reports into the House and good work done. I believe that even though we have the access to information study starting fairly shortly, we can walk and chew gum at the same time. We can run two different studies concurrently. I think we have plenty of time between now and our Christmas break to get this work done.

The Liberals are saying that this is important. I invite them to participate in this, to support it, so we can get moving forward.

Some of the motions Ms. Khalid has put on notice may be successful. Who knows? We have to get them on the floor and have that discussion. There may be time by the end of this meeting for us to have those discussions, if she chooses to move those for further debate.

I think there is a spirit of collaboration around the table. We have shown that in studies over the last few months. I think there is an opportunity here to put together a good report and get down to the bottom of some of the accusations that were made.

Ms. Saks asked why there is an urgency to do it now. There were some accusations made in the media last week that changed the scope of what has been happening down on Roxham Road, and that's why I think we need to look at the behaviour of some public office holders in relation to those contracts.

The Chair: Next I have Monsieur Paul-Hus.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is in fact quite a specific matter that clearly pertains to ethics.

I am a member of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, which considers contracts, and have served on the Standing Committee on National Defence, and various other committees. In this particular case, there is a clear ethical issue and that is why I think this committee should conduct this study.

People have asked why the urgency. Let us not forget that, in the past five years, half a billion dollars has been spent in response to the Lacolle and Roxham Road situation.

Today, there are also specific questions about the Lacolle sector. Liberal party donors are involved in this and there are hidden contracts. National security reasons are cited, and yet the purpose of the contracts is to install tents and equipment. It is ridiculous. The information we have received raises an ethical issue. That information is from Radio-Canada. We did not make it up. Research has been done. When a media outlet such as Radio-Canada does a full report, with specific facts, the least we can do is shed some light on this matter as soon as possible.

It is urgent because contracts are renewed for five years, and we have some very critical questions to ask. That is why this committee is the best place. I would go so far as to say that there should be a number of ethics committees. In fact, there are often ethical issues that we never get an answer to.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next I have Ms. Hepfner.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): I don't have a whole lot to add, but I agree with my colleagues, Ms. Khalid and Ms. Saks, that it seems this motion is coming out of the blue. I've been hearing the Bloc Québécois talk about it in the House for months now, every day, and I don't understand why we have a study that says, for example, that this needs to be "as soon as possible". I am interested in the ATIP study that we have scheduled to come up next, and I'm interested in getting to the bottom of that study.

I'm also not sure why this study fits with our mandate here on the ethics committee.

Those are my main points. Roxham Road is also a valuable resource for a lot of people who don't have other ways to come into the country, and I know there's a member of Parliament who arrived in the country through that access. As far as I understand it, the government was responding to the need when it invested in the resources to help vulnerable people access the country.

I want to reiterate the points made by my colleagues. This seems like it's coming out of the blue. I don't know if we have seen collaboration around the whole table or just among the members of the opposition. I would prefer to move on with some of the studies we already have in the hopper, like the ATIP study.

It seems that I have lost the attention of members opposite, so I will pass the floor back over to you.

The Chair: Okay. I have Iqra next.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

I'll just pick up on a point that Mr. Bezan made, which I think is really important, with respect to tightening the scope of the study. In the spirit of collaboration, while I would like to ensure that I'm able to have my motions studied, I would also like to make sure the issues the opposition feel are so important are also studied. Mr. Bezan is absolutely right that we have to narrow these to the scope of what this committee is all about.

I read the original 106(4) letter that went to you, Mr. Chair. It talks about a whole bunch of things that I think are out of the scope. We are not here to talk about processes with respect to how IRCC is working or what the function of Roxham Road is or what the procurement processes have been in this respect, whether or not this is a good use of resources, or whether or not there are enough resources. The letter indicates that we have to make sure government is open and transparent and resources are being used effectively.

I think we're okay to keep things within that scope and, in the interest of ensuring that we have enough time for other studies and are not just saying, over so many meetings long, the same things again and again, I will perhaps seek to amend the motion as presented by Mr. Villemure for the removal of the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship as a witness. I agree with Mr. Bezan that some things may be being studied in other committees and that we need to be cognizant of duplicating certain work. I would propose it—the removal of the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship as a listed witness—as an amendment to the main motion, just to make it tight and bring it within the scope of what we're doing here in ethics. That's in the spirit of collaboration with Mr. Bezan and to try to get done concretely what Mr. Bezan has said he would like us to do.

● (1605)

The Chair: We have an amendment, and it is in order. Is there any discussion on the amendment?

On a point of order, go ahead, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Just to clarify, the amendment is to remove the Minister of Immigration but keep the Minister of Public Safety.

The Chair: Yes. Is there any discussion on the amendment?

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you so much.

I was hoping that members might want to see if this was a proper scope for an amendment. Is it proper to limit the issues that we want to talk about here specifically with respect to Roxham Road?

There was one other thing that really struck me in the letter, which kind of speaks to this amendment also, and that is the indication, for some reason, that the gentleman who is involved, Monsieur Pierre Guay, is “a businessman known for his donations to the Liberal Party”. I found that to be a little strangely placed within the letter. I'm sure Monsieur Villemure, as he was drafting his letter, would have known that Monsieur Pierre Guay was also a donor to the Conservative Party.

Again, within the scope, we're talking about transparency and trust in public institutions. We're talking about how we narrow that and study the issues that matter, and I think the way this letter outlines it really shows that we're indeed not focused on the right issues. By virtue of continuing to say again and again that this is eroding the public trust or there's no trust in government institutions, I think the opposition members are doing that part of eroding the trust themselves.

Again, I go back to my initial point, which is to say look, folks, we want to play ball. We want to make sure what we're doing is effective as a government, that the way we do it is open and transparent, and that we are continuing to provide not only the support that Canadians need but also the principles and the importance of providing the humanitarian support as needed. We need to do this without scapegoating and without calling into light people who may then not want to play ball in the future, or who may be scared off and say, “Oh no, should anybody engage with government or political parties or what have you, now, all of a sudden, they're go-

ing to get targeted.” That is not a precedent we should be setting here.

I think the way to move forward is through my amendment to limit the scope of what we are studying. Having the Minister of Public Safety and having the RCMP and the other officials as listed in the motion would keep the scope to the issue that is in front of us right now. I'm hoping I can get the support of members opposite for my amendment.

● (1610)

The Chair: I will take a moment just to remind all members that we are debating the amendment, not the general motion. I would ask that remarks be specific to the amendment. Once the amendment is disposed of, we can certainly take additional time to debate the rest of the motion.

With that, go ahead, Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank Mr. Bezan for the agreement, at least in principle, of making sure we are tight on scope, particularly with the work of this committee.

With regard to the amendment of Ms. Khalid in terms of questions of Roxham Road as a point of entry for asylum seekers, those questions would be far better placed at immigration than here.

In terms of what we do here in this committee, particularly on the issues of procurement, this has been a place that funds have gone into for the past five years to address the needs. We have to be cognizant of what we're looking at here.

Roxham Road came into existence not because CBSA decided to set up a point of entry there. It's that asylum seekers have been going there for years, as Ms. Hepfner mentioned. For one of our colleagues in the House, actually, her point of entry into Canada was through Roxham Road. It is known as a place for asylum seekers. Since it is known, and known internationally, and because of the sheer volume, the demand, the need, and also the climate there—you know, it is cold through the winters—the need to facilitate safe entry for those who are seeking safety is critical, and that costs money to our border services. It is up to our agencies, like procurement, to ensure that we provide a safe space for asylum seekers when they arrive there.

When we're looking at a span of time and the costs and needs that are associated with that, I would ask again if those are necessarily scope questions that we ask here. Surely we would want to ensure that the services provided.... I have no issue with the Minister of Public Safety coming here to discuss what reactionary implementation has been put into place at Roxham Road to address the volume of asylum seekers who are coming into that place. However, are we asking the question of whether this is a new border crossing, or are we asking the question...? I'm just trying to be clear on who is coming to the table to impact the questions that we want to ask on the monies that are spent at this site to facilitate people's having safe entry when they come here seeking asylum 12 months of the year through rain or shine or freezing cold winters. They should be able to arrive to safety with dignity and compassion.

Again, in terms of the transparency and accountability, I'm with you. We absolutely want to make sure that we have that in all the things we do, including the operations at Roxham Road. Also, we must have a deep understanding of why we do them. Being the third-party country that we are in accepting asylum seekers, when folks arrive for safety here we are able to provide them with the services and tools they need when they arrive at our border.

I just want to be clear on keeping the scope where it needs to be and ensuring that the funds we allocate provide services and tools there. We also have to understand who's there. The Government of Canada did not choose this as a border crossing or point of entry; asylum seekers chose it. Who, geographically, was in the area? What buildings and landowners are around there whose land is being crossed through? We need to understand these things to ensure that we're finding the right balance of making sure those who cross are protected and also recognizing that if this isn't a federally mandated border area, we have to work with who is there. In this case, it's Monsieur Pierre Guay, who I understand is one of the main land owners in the area who owns some of the buildings. How do we ensure, if there is only one sole proprietor in the area, that the contracts are negotiated the way they should be?

● (1615)

We need to provide services for those who arrive and use the tools that are available to us with deep consideration and, of course, transparency and accountability. Again, I certainly hope that we are all working collaboratively to ensure that the questions we want to ask are the right questions and that the scope is clear.

I'll cede the floor back to you, Mr. Chair. Those are my thoughts at the moment about the motion.

The Chair: I see Ms. Khalid.

Go ahead.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks, Chair.

I want to perhaps outline what exactly happens within the centre and why I think that removing the Minister of Immigration helps us to scope this motion effectively. IRCC, or Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, is responsible for accommodating claimants who arrive there until they're transferred to the province, including the 14-day isolation period, which was then mandatory for claimants without a suitable quarantine plan, for example. In ad-

dition, IRCC supports the CBSA's eligibility determination processing.

Given that IRCC is playing more of a supporting role with respect to the functioning of this centre, I believe it would be outside the scope of our mandate. Imagine if we brought in a minister responsible for this specific file, what kinds of questions we would be asking the minister. Would we be asking them about how they process, how they support, how many files they go through on a daily basis, what their day to day looks like? I think that would fall completely out of the purview of our committee—looking at the scope of what it is we're trying to do here—and take it into a rabbit hole that would overlap with work that other committees would be doing.

That's why, again, I ask my colleagues to support my amendment to remove the Minister of Immigration from this list of witnesses. As I said, I have no problems with other witnesses as they're listed; I think that having the Minister of Immigration within this motion would broaden the study to a point where it would fall outside the scope of the work this committee is mandated with and should be doing.

I'll leave it at that, Chair. Thanks.

The Chair: All right. I see no other speakers to the amendment, so I'm going to call for a vote.

In a hybrid session, we do this in reverse and I ask whether there is anyone opposed to the amendment.

As there are members opposed, we will go to a recorded vote.

There is a tie. I vote against the amendment.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: With that, we will move on to the main motion.

Are there any speakers to the main motion?

Go ahead, Ms. Hepfner. You will be followed by Ms. Khalid.

● (1620)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Given that my colleague's motion didn't pass, there is another part of the motion that I want to address.

I see that we have in this motion “that the committee allocate a minimum of 6 meetings to conduct this study”. To me, that sounds like a lot for this study, given the number of witnesses that we have listed, given the scope and given the fact that we have so many other studies in front of us that we should get to. I'm not sure that six meetings.... It seems like a little bit too much to me. It seems like a lot of time that this committee would be spending on something that we've just addressed. That would be my point. I would maybe request....

Can I put forward a motion to remove it or to switch it to a minimum of, say, two meetings to conduct this study?

The Chair: You have the floor. While you have the floor, you're entitled to move any amendment you wish, as long as it's in order. If you wish to make an amendment, go ahead and do so.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate the guidance, given that I'm still quite new to this committee.

I would like to move that we strike “that the committee allocate a minimum of 6 meetings” and maybe replace it with a minimum of two meetings to conduct this study. I think we can do it in two meetings.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: No...? Maybe I'd just strike that we “allocate a minimum of 6 meetings”, and we can speak further about how many meetings we should conduct this study over, but it just seems to me that six is way too many.

The Chair: If you wish to change this motion, I need you to be specific, so if it's your intent to—

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: I'd like to remove “a minimum of 6 meetings” from the motion.

The Chair: Okay. That motion is in order.

If I understood Ms. Hepfner correctly, the motion is simply to strike the words “allocate a minimum of 6 meetings”. There will be no minimum and no maximum: There will be no comment in the motion on the number of meetings.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Right, and then the committee can decide if it needs more meetings. If we can get it all done in two meetings, then we can just wrap up, and we're not committed to six meetings, whether or not we need them.

The Chair: Thank you.

The amendment is in order.

On my speaking list, I have Ms. Khalid, followed by Ms. Saks, and I see that Mr. Ferguson has also put his hand up. That is the current list of speakers.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks, Chair.

I hate to do this, but given that my colleagues on the opposite side don't really engage, maybe we'll just engage with ourselves: I would disagree with Ms. Hepfner.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Sorry, folks. I think we need to limit or to clearly outline how long such a study should be within the scope that we have spoken about.

In the work plan, we have the Minister of Public Safety, we have officials, we have Monsieur Pierre Guay and we have other witnesses. I think one hour per witness should be more than sufficient, so I would propose maybe a subamendment to Ms. Hepfner's amendment as proposed.

I'm just looking at the wording so that I can get this right. I think Ms. Hepfner is proposing that the words “that the committee allocate a minimum of 6 meetings to conduct this study” be struck from the motion. Is that correct?

• (1625)

The Chair: Yes. That's the amendment we're currently debating.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Right, so if I wanted to propose a subamendment, would I then say “that the committee allocate two meetings to conduct this study”?

Would that make sense, Chair?

The Chair: Okay, and you're specifying.... I guess that's both a minimum and a maximum.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm saying two meetings—no minimum or maximum.

The Chair: Currently we're debating the amendment to delete the words “allocate a minimum of 6 meetings”. You're instead proposing that the committee allocate two meetings.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, Chair.

The Chair: Okay. That is the first rule on the subamendment, and I rule that it is in order.

I have a point of order from Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: I would make the argument, Mr. Chair, although you've already ruled on it, that the subamendment changes the intent of the original amendment, which was to take away any restrictions on meetings—minimums or maximums.

I would have suggested that Ms. Hepfner's amendment be voted on first and then Ms. Khalid could move her amendment to specify the minimum number of meetings.

The Chair: I have ruled on it. I saw the intent as being less specific in Ms. Hepfner's motion.

If there is no further debate, we can go straight to voting on the subamendment and then deal with the amendment.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Mr. Chair, I believe my hand was up.

The Chair: Yes, that's correct. I saw that you were next. If you wish to speak now, we are debating the subamendment.

Please limit your remarks. I gave a lot of latitude on the debate on the last amendment, but I'm going to ask that we focus on the subamendment on the number of meetings.

Go ahead. You have the floor, Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the spirit of agreement and disagreement and collaborative efforts here, if I go back to my colleague, Mr. Bezan, who wanted us to be clear on the specificity of what we're studying in this committee, I think that Ms. Khalid's comments are actually even more important than the subamendment that she's moving.

Again, I've been here for a year. I've spoken to colleagues across the way about matters of importance on studies that we wish to do. Sometimes we agree and sometimes we disagree on them, and Mr. Green is nodding his head. He and I have had quite a number of conversations on prioritizing and making sure that good work gets done. I would say that the same is true here.

I think that if we keep it structured rather than open-ended, and we're clear on the witnesses we need to have here, we can get through the study and have clarity on exactly what we're trying to address in this committee, and then move on to the other important matters of the day. With regard to studies we've put forward, for example, I've gone back and forth on single digital ID and the importance of having that discussion as well in this forum.

For the sake of keeping us on track for the studies and the important work we all wish to do, I am very supportive of Ms. Khalid in giving this legs. If Monsieur Villemure sees a sense of urgency here, as it appears that other colleagues do—although I'm not quite sure after 10 months where the urgency lies—we at least have to keep it tight. Let's keep it structured and keep it tight so we can continue with the other important work we have to do here.

And yes, Mr. Bezan, I do walk and chew gum as well, so I hear you on that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1630)

The Chair: Next I have Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First, I must apologize to my colleagues for being late today. I took part virtually, which is one of the benefits of the hybrid system, namely, that we can always perform our constituency role efficiently.

First, I would like to speak to Mr. Villemure's motion. Considering the possibility... Honestly, it does not seem necessary, but we will do our duty, I expect. Like all the members seated at the table, I can count, and I know full well that, when the opposition wants something, it ultimately gets its way. That said, are we really talking about spending six committee meetings on this?

Initially, when we started planning for the much more important issue of facial recognition, we had proposed six meetings. It is an issue that affects a great many people. A study that is based on a Radio-Canada report, which stated, to our great surprise, that a businessman who was once a Conservative donor is now a Liberal donor, and could in the future become a Bloc Québécois donor, does not seem important to me.

You will certainly have your turn, Mr. Green.

Personally, I think six meetings is too much. We are talking about hearing from a minister, her officials, the person directly responsible for the Roxham Road crossing, and the person who made those donations.

We could add a great many other people, but I have a lot of trouble imagining that we would need more than two meetings, Mr. Chair. I think having two meetings would be perfectly acceptable. That is four hours of testimony. Four hours spent on something that I really think can be sorted out quite easily.

If we are really concerned about something unacceptable we have heard, we can refer the matter to the Auditor General for her to dig into all the details. That is her role.

That said, for the time the committee has left, if we ask our questions carefully and in due form, and if they really address the concerns of Mr. Villemure and other Canadians who want to make sure that things are managed properly without anything underhanded, I am confident we can do that in two meetings, with four hours of testimony. We could then get back to the issues at hand, such as access to information, and continue other studies that we have already begun, but have not yet presented in the House of Commons.

To my mind, we can have a good discussion among colleagues, and some of you might find this amusing, but, in this case, I think the fact that we really want to find the best way to conduct a study demonstrates our good faith.

That said, I am confident that, if there were no cameras, if we were in camera and had a good discussion as we do when there are no cameras, everyone would thank Mr. Villemure, but say that instead of six meetings on the matter, we can find a way to work more efficiently.

• (1635)

That is why I am making this argument to you. If we can set a goal of two meetings, we could quickly move on to other issues that I consider much more important.

We have to do our duty. I hope the testimony and evidence will show that there is nothing to worry about, that everything is in order, and that we can move on to another matter.

I would also note that I appreciate Ms. Khalid's subamendment. I think that she, as a former chair of this committee, sympathizes a lot with you, Mr. Chair.

I hope we can find a way to resolve this amicably.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Iqra Khalid): I chaired the Standing Committee on Justice.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I apologize, Mr. Chair, but I have a lot of respect for you as chair of the committee, as I have for Ms. Khalid as chair of the Standing Committee on Justice.

I hope we can agree on two meetings. It is reasonable to think that four hours of testimony will be ample. I would be very surprised if it took any more than that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next I have Ms. Khalid, followed by Mr. Green.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks, Chair.

I want to again just highlight that getting through these witnesses within two meetings is absolutely possible. We have six witnesses listed here. I think, with a one-hour block for each, we should be able to get through all of them.

I understand the importance of this motion. I also understand the importance of ensuring that we're spending our time as efficiently as possible. I think having two meetings is a very efficient way for us to get through this issue and to move on to other important issues that are also on our docket, Chair.

Again, I am just saying to members opposite that we would like—and I think it's reasonable for me to suggest—to do this study within two meetings. I will also highlight that had members of the opposition consulted with us and we'd had this conversation rather than being called in on a 106(4), we could have used this as one of the meetings to be more efficient, instead of having the opposition trying to find “gotcha” moments, which makes no sense to me at all. We're at the table. We're trying to play ball. It would be nice to have those discussions.

Again, just looking for efficient use of our time, I think that two meetings would be quite sufficient.

Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you.

I want to note the use of the word “efficient” while we're simultaneously experiencing a mini filibuster, with the government side debating themselves on the matter. When I look at this, I need to be convinced that there is a smoking gun. I'll say, out of whatever goodwill may be remaining around the table, that from my perspective, if in the first couple of meetings—although I have no interest in maximizing it at two—if within the first two or three meetings, let's say, if I find the evidence does not compel further exploration, I would be open to reducing it from three weeks to two weeks or something like that. However, I will be supporting the motion as it stands now, knowing that the committee has the purview to either extend or conclude, depending on the evidence that's presented.

What I will say, though, is that if we're going to talk about efficiency, then let's show it, right? Let's not filibuster topics where we could just quickly move through the business and get to what needs to be done here. From that perspective, I'm putting it out there to all parties that if we embark on this and it becomes apparent early on that there aren't in fact ethical breaches that would be relevant to the mandate of this committee, then I would be open to concluding the committee or having it referred to other places.

As it stands now, based on what is reported, and having spent some time on procurement and public services on OGGO and on public accounts, I can share with you that I'm concerned with how this is being presented. We've heard it here today, with the implications of donors from both the Liberal and Conservative sides. I thank the member from the Bloc for raising this important issue. I think it's timely. This notion that somehow it's just coming out of the blue suggests that maybe perhaps folks aren't keeping up with the news in Quebec. I know I do: Sometimes I make it, and I certainly watch it.

From that, I just want to put it to all parties that if we get into this—and I quite frankly don't think there's anything there—you may find that I withdraw my support from making it go for four, five or six weeks. If we get the evidence that suggests or demands further exploration, I'm also on for extending it if it so requires, to have more witnesses. Ultimately, with these issues, if there's one point—and they're quite right—that I would concede to my friends on the Liberal side, it's that these exercises erode public trust, and when it erodes public trust, it's not partisan.

Basically, people look at all of us the same way, including parties that may or may not even be involved, so I want to go through it carefully. I'm hopeful that we can explore topics like what it's like to be a whistle-blower within government, what it's like to have procurement that is open and transparent, what the code of conflict looks like, what lobbying looks like—all these things that pertain to the mandate of this committee.

Those are my only remarks for today, and they will be my only remarks. I just want to put everybody on notice.

Thank you.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Now I have Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, for the benefit of Canadians watching us on television, I must say that I really appreciate Mr. Green's input, but I can imagine how it will play out. If we decide on six meetings, what Canadians do not know is that the first thing we will do as members, in camera, is draw up the list of witnesses. If we are talking about a four-hour meeting, we suggest witnesses to take up four hours of testimony, and we select people who we think would be in the best position to give us the most relevant information for our study.

If we decide to have 12 hours of testimony, everyone will have a bucketful of proposed testimony. Everyone will invite someone to appear, their brothers and sisters, cousins. I expect that, after a few hours, we will find there is really no issue, there is no scandal. Then people will say we have to wait until we have heard the 24 other people proposed to appear before the committee. We will have listen to everyone before deciding that there really is no issue, even though we knew that from the outset. That is how it goes.

I know Mr. Green would like us to be very efficient, but let's be frank. We will find a way to continue that kind of testimony until we have reached or surpassed the reasonable limit for digging into the matter.

That is why, Mr. Chair, I think that, in the interest of efficiency, we should carefully select the people we invite to discuss this matter. In that way, we will be able to determine whether there is a *prima facie* case to be explored. There is not.

Moreover, if we decide on six meetings, they will drag out over several weeks. It is important that we find a way now to decide how we will approach this matter. I might not have been the best student at university, but if there was one thing I knew how to do, it was answer exam questions. Even before I started answering the questions, I always did a quick overview of the whole exam, to get the bigger picture. We have to do the same thing here before we invite everyone and his dog to appear just because we have to fill the allotted time. I think it would be better to take a look at the situation. We could even ask our analysts to prepare a document to help us.

If we take Mr. Green's sound suggestion, we would plan for two meetings, four hours of our time, and would invite the people responsible for awarding the contracts for this program.

• (1645)

Then, if we find any concrete evidence, we could pursue the matter further.

On the other hand, allocating six meetings, or 12 hours of our time, when there are other matters to be considered, I really think that would be a huge waste of our time. I think it is entirely reasonable to take all the time we need to debate this now.

If we are to discuss the options to determine exactly what we want to study, we should take the time to do that today, rather than waste six or seven meetings later on.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green: On a point of order, Chair, if they keep filibustering, I'm not going to [Inaudible—Editor]. That's all there is to it. If they keep it up, I'm going to withdraw.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Threats serve no purpose.

Let us take the time now to set the parameters for our forthcoming meetings. It is often said in Parliament that what is most valuable to a member is time management, and that is exactly what we are doing right now. I think we need to recognize that. Otherwise, it is really a witch hunt and a waste of time.

I do not see how we could justify six meetings on this matter. We could have a good discussion with witnesses. We could ask relevant questions because we would know our time is limited. If someone would like to suggest fewer than six meetings, I would very likely want to hear them.

I think we are taking it too far, going beyond what is normal. So I will vote in favour of Ms. Khalid's subamendment, and I hope others will follow suit.

• (1650)

[English]

The Chair: I have Monsieur Paul-Hus on the subamendment.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to remind my colleagues opposite of an instance when our committee did a study that lasted just one meeting. It was relating to the Frank Baylis contracts. There was an ethical problem: Mr. Baylis had a government contract worth \$237 million, although the whole market said it was not worth more than \$100 million. He got an absolutely excessive contract to make 10,000 fans. Our committee held just one meeting on the subject, and we never got to the bottom of the matter. It is big ethical issue. We never found out how a company called FTI, that was created a week before receiving the contract from a guy who manufactures auto parts in Ontario, who was later linked to Frank Baylis, obtained a contract worth \$237 million. That would have warranted several meetings.

Mr. Chair, we can see the structure and organization in the La-colle sector: there are clearly-identified conflicts of interest and ethical issues, and there are other unknown relationships with companies that received contracts in recent years. I have visited the site myself several times when I was responsible for public safety. In 2018, for instance, I saw tents built to accommodate 3,000 people that were never used. Who won those contracts? How did that come about? Why can we not get any information about it? We need a lot more than one or two meetings to get the full picture of what happened there. We are talking about half a billion dollars spent in the past five years. Now the contracts are being renewed.

I think six meetings would be entirely reasonable, given the complexity of the whole matter. If, after three meetings, the committee has obtained all the information it needs, we could wrap it up then. It is essential that we schedule six meetings though, even if we finish earlier if everyone has answered. If we simply present an amendment saying that two meetings are enough and sweep it under the carpet, it will be the same outcome as in the Frank Baylis case.

There are problems with Tango Marketing, for instance, a contract worth a hundred million dollars for masks from China, which in the end were rubbish. Fortunately, the government took it to Federal Court, but the fact remains that it is a contract with old friends of the party. That is not the first instance of questionable practices since 2015. In that case, there were quite specific factors that merited further attention.

In this case, two meetings with five-minute blocks to ask a question would not be sufficient.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: I have a lot of respect for my colleague Mr. Paul-Hus, but as we say in English,

[English]

jumping the shark.

[Translation]

Yes, Mr. Paul-Hus, quite a scandal was made of Mr. Baylis and his partner.

We invited him to appear before the committee, but we did not even use all the time allotted for questions because everyone immediately realized that he was dud.

I was a member of the committee, but you were not there. Mr. Baylis has there with his partner, a well-known Conservative, who had invited Mr. Baylis to join him. What are you doing now? You are just mudslinging, Mr. Paul-Hus. I expected a lot better of you, given your experience in Parliament and your excellent reputation. We had quite the discussion here.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan: I have a point of order. I would just say that the debate is not relevant to the amendment. We're talking about having only two meetings. I just think we should give it to the function of the meeting. To go in about individuals and all that... I think we should just be talking about—

• (1655)

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Pardon me.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan, for raising the issue of debate on the amendment itself, or the subamendment.

Mr. Fergus, you had quite a bit in that intervention without yet getting to the subamendment. I would ask that you do so.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I am raising this point because, when Mr. Paul-Hus made his remarks, he mentioned the former member for Pierrefonds—Dollard six, no seven times, saying something that sounded off.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: No one said anything because he said we had only one meeting on the issue. We spent a lot of time on that issue. We spent a number of meetings discussing the matter and came to the conclusion that it was a witch hunt, a smear campaign against a former member of the House.

Getting back to what Mr. Green said about setting out on such a campaign when there is no substance, nothing that is founded, spending six or seven meetings on an issue when there is nothing...

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, speaking to the point of order...

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Yes, I am referring to that.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. Yes. I tried to keep Mr. Bezan's intervention pretty quick on that, and I awarded, I think, a fair bit of latitude in your intervention. I merely point out that your remarks should address the subamendment. Just be careful to do that as you continue.

Go ahead. You have the floor.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: I will continue talking about the subamendment. We said we would limit it to two meetings.

Mr. Chair, when there is no other proof than finding a person's name on Elections Canada's public and transparent list of all Canadians who donated between \$100 and \$1,600 per year to a political party, when that is the only thing people are interested in, I find that very unfortunate.

The result is what Mr. Paul-Hus suggested. These are nothing but unfounded allegations. That is why I think six meetings is too many, and I say that once again with a lot of respect for Mr. Paul-Hus. As I said, he is someone who has a good reputation that is well deserved. He made an error this time, and that is unfortunate. Saying such things is not to his credit, in this instance. He has a good and well-deserved reputation, and I hope he will stop repeating things like that. I am certain he will not repeat them outside this room. I hope he will not do so here either.

Let us get back to the matter at hand, the subamendment and the two meetings. Mr. Chair, once again, this is the best way to get a good overview. If there is something fishy, we can pursue the matter further or, if something shocks us, we can refer the matter to the people who can conduct a full investigation, such as the Auditor General. There is also the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. I am convinced, and I would even bet on it, that it will not go very far and that we will not have two waste four meetings that we could have set aside—as we should—to consider access to information and other matters raised by a number of members at this table.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1700)

[English]

The Chair: Seeing no other speakers, are there any opposed to the subamendment?

An hon. member: I am totally opposed.

The Chair: We'll proceed, then, to a vote on the subamendment.

There is a tie, and I vote against the subamendment.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The subamendment is defeated and we are back to the amendment.

I think you were trying to get my attention, Mr. Fergus. Did you want to speak to the amendment?

Hon. Greg Fergus: I do, Mr. Chair, but I've taken up a lot of people's time. I'd love it if someone else would want to speak before I go there.

The Chair: Mr. Fergus is deferring to others.

Is there anybody else who wishes to speak to the amendment?

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

Given the comments made by my colleagues, perhaps I will very quickly try to compromise a little further on the number of meetings. I will propose a subamendment for three meetings, perhaps.

I will not debate this. We can go to a vote.

I would again encourage my colleagues here to contemplate and consider how much more we have on the agenda and how we can narrow the scope, as Mr. Bezan said, to keep a tight study on this issue—specifically this issue.

I think it is possible to do it in three meetings. I would encourage members to support it.

The Chair: All right. In the interim, since the earlier subamendment, I've conferred with the clerk on this issue of material change. There are a couple of ways we can handle this.

If there's unanimous consent of the committee, we can withdraw the amendment, bring your amendment, and make your suggestion into an amendment to the main motion, debate it and vote on it. I think that would be the better way to do it. I perhaps might have handled the other one differently around the material change to the intent of the amendment.

I see nodding.

Is there anyone opposed to Ms. Hefner's withdrawing her amendment and allowing Ms. Khalid to then make an amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Green.

• (1705)

Mr. Matthew Green: On a point of order, in my opinion, Ms. Hefner's motion was more materially different from the main motion than Ms. Khalid's motion. If the intent is that we're going to just move subamendments and change the days and continue to eat up the meeting, I'm not on for any of that. I'm opposed to that.

I'd like to get back to Ms. Hefner's motion and then get to the main motion and on to the study, if possible.

The Chair: I will take it that I do not have unanimous consent to proceed in the way I suggested. In that case, I'm going to rule the subamendment out of order.

We will go to the amendment. If there's no discussion, we will vote on the amendment. If there are other amendments, we will deal with them then.

Is there any discussion on—

Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I'll say this very briefly, because I imagine there is a unified view as to what is going to happen here. I'm going to take people at their word when they say that if they feel there is nothing there after a couple of meetings, they won't entertain wasting the time of the committee nor ruining the reputation of Parliament in general, and will shut it down.

I look forward to that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I don't see anyone else seeking the floor on the amendment.

Are there any members opposed to the amendment?

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm opposed.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, we will go to a vote on the amendment.

The vote is tied, and I am opposed.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*]).

The Chair: We are back on the main motion.

I'm looking for speakers to the main motion. I have Mr. Fergus, followed by Ms. Khalid.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, we have this motion by my colleague Monsieur Villemure to invite some specific people on this item and some people who are left nameless.

If the chair feels it would be appropriate.... I'm beginning to wonder why we would want to name particular people who occupy certain positions within our federal public service who are responsible for different aspects of this. How do we know that person is not about to head off on parental leave, or on sick leave or will leave for whatever reason? What will end up happening is we will have not six, but 12 meetings, because we have to wait. This is going to drag on and on.

I hope that my colleague across the way would consider speaking to the positions that the people who can best talk to these issues hold, as opposed to naming particular individuals. This will allow the clerk to reach the appropriate person and make sure they can come forward, so that we can discharge our duties as quickly and efficiently as possible, even though the framework really is dissatisfactory to me.

• (1710)

The Chair: Before I take the next speaker, I will draw attention to the wording of the motion. This is a motion to invite. We often invite witnesses and witnesses do not always accept the invitation. When a witness doesn't accept an invitation, we will often examine the reasons a witness might have declined, such as straightforward availability, as you pointed out, Mr. Fergus. It's then up to the committee members what steps they may want to take further or in stronger terms than an invitation, but the motion moves only to invite, not to compel at this stage.

I will go to Ms. Khalid next.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm sorry, Chair. I think Ms. Saks's hand was up before mine was.

The Chair: Okay. I had her after you, but you're welcome to switch the order if you wish.

Go ahead, Ms. Saks. You have the floor.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Now that we're back to the main motion, I feel it's really important that we clarify here the importance of Roxham Road in keeping asylum seekers safe, healthy and protected, so they don't freeze when they arrive at our borders, and so they're not sick. They are coming here for safety, and that's what Roxham Road is—it's a port of entry for those who are desperate to find safety. I think we need to keep that in mind as we go through the machinations of this, of bringing witnesses forward, and understand what we're trying to get to at the heart of this.

Mr. Chair, prior to the pandemic, it fluctuated year by year, but based on the numbers I've seen, Roxham Road was seeing anywhere between 18,000 and 20,000 a year. Here we are at the beginning of October, and this year already 20,000 have crossed at Roxham Road, seeking safety here. There has been a heightened need to provide service to those who are seeking asylum here, and as Canadians, we have never turned a blind eye to that, nor should we at this moment.

I understand the concerns of my colleague Monsieur Villemure in bringing this forward and what Monsieur Paul-Hus has also put forward and what's been in the media, but I think we also have to differentiate between the noise and the facts as to why Roxham Road operates and the principles and values behind that, which we, not just as a government but as Canadians, have committed to for those who seek shelter and safety.

You know, this is a concerted effort of IRCC, CBSA and procurement to provide that safety, that asylum, to those who are crossing the border at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle, and we have to understand that, since we're looking at the amounts of money that are in question. We also have to recognize that the road they're entering on for Roxham Road is *montée Guay*. There is one landlord at Roxham Road, and it's Monsieur Pierre Guay, and whether he's donated to Conservatives in the past—which he has—or whether he's donated to Liberals in the past—which he also has, to their respective parties—at the end of the day, Monsieur Guay is the landlord there. My colleague, Mr. Green, having sat on OGGO and other committees, would know perfectly well that when there are sole proprietors, procurement has procedures in place to negotiate agreements

at market value and to ensure that all the steps in that process are taken and taken appropriately. There is no other competitor there, from what I understand, from what I've seen of the mapping.

What are we talking about? We're talking about winterized safety shelters where they can provide nurses and point-of-entry immigration people to help with processing and filing. Let's be clear about what is happening in this space at Roxham Road, who is being served and their purpose, and also who owns the space in which we as Canadians are trying to provide a service for the folks who are coming through. I am all for transparency and I am all for accountability and I am all for the clarity of understanding what happens in this space, but if we're looking for a gotcha moment or a smoking gun for the sake of time in this committee, I certainly hope that it is not at the expense of the 20,000 vulnerable men, women and children who cross this border year after year seeking safety here in Canada.

I appreciate Mr. Green's comments that he feels satisfied that no untoward contracts were issued, but as he mentioned, he's sat on other committees, so he knows perfectly well how sole-proprietor commercial contracts are awarded. In a case like this, where there is another owner of this space, where IRCC and CBSA have had to set up services for safety, we have to be really clear on why we're going to take up to six meetings on this, on what is an essential part of what we as Canadians hold dear: providing safe harbour for those who are seeking safety.

• (1715)

I feel it's important to keep that lens in play as we move through Mr. Villemure's...because we can get caught up in the noise and all of that. At the end of the day, it's about where our priorities lie in ensuring that those who are fleeing from human rights violations and other atrocities around the world, and who seek safety here, are best protected when they come through our ports of entry.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Saks.

I have Ms. Khalid next.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I won't echo a lot of what Ms. Saks said, other than to agree with her.

We have established a work plan. I did say—and I will refresh the memories of members opposite, who are all looking down at their phones—that it would be nice for us to add this study to the docket of studies we have proposed. As I've indicated before, we have the study on access to information up next.

I have proposed two studies. The first deals with the use of microphones, security and cybersecurity for vehicles as they become more and more digitized. The second deals with the issue of privacy regarding children's use of devices, more and more. I think those are two very important and pertinent issues.

I would propose an amendment. Again, I don't want to debate this. I would hope that members opposite take it into consideration and put this study on the docket with all the other studies we have, and create a work plan in a more collaborative way.

I would propose, Mr. Chair, that we strike the words "as soon as possible"....

I was going to move an amendment, Mr. Chair, but I'll wait.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I was conferring with the clerk for a quick moment.

Please, go ahead.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I would strike the words "as soon as possible" from this motion in the first line. The effect of this would ultimately be to place this motion within the longer list of work plans and studies we have proposed in this committee. This is to make sure we're prioritizing all the issues that each of us has presented before this committee, and to ensure that we keep triaging the order of the work that needs to get done here.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We have another amendment. The amendment is in order.

Before I open it up for further debate on the amendment, I will share with the committee that it was my intent, had this motion passed unamended, to continue on with the Wednesday meeting as scheduled. My ruling of "as soon as possible" would have granted that it will take more than a couple of days to arrange the first meeting. It was my intention to continue and go ahead with the Wednesday meeting, as it is on notice. I put that out there to all members, so you understand how I would have interpreted "as soon as possible", which is just that—as soon as you could realistically put further meetings together.

With that, I will open up for debate on the amendment. I put that out there in case it colours anyone's thoughts on this amendment.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

• (1720)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

While I understand and respect your interpretation, as chair of this committee. I've been in committees where we've tried to eat multiple sandwiches at the same time, or take on lots of studies at the same time. It just doesn't work, in that—

Mr. Bezan: I have an observation.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm sorry, Mr. Bezan. I wasn't able to hear you while I was talking. I'm not able to listen and talk at the same time, unfortunately.

Mr. Bezan: It's no problem.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: My concern is that I don't want us to not do justice to both of the studies we're trying to get done at the same time. I think it would be more efficient for us to get through the ATIP study, then move on to other studies we have on the docket, including this one, Mr. Chair. That would be my take.

Where it says, "as soon as possible" in this motion, my interpretation is that we put aside everything else and get to this, first and foremost. I don't think that's a proper triage of the work that is before this committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Monsieur Villemure and then Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have heard various arguments today. Two hours have passed and we have not even got to the first item. That is unfortunate.

I would like to reassure my colleague, Mr. Fergus, that the witnesses suggested have been informed.

Everyone agrees that this is an important and worthwhile subject. We have talked about the length of the study. Nonetheless, in order to begin considering an important matter, we must simply begin. We have talked a lot about what people will think of us if we take six meetings for this. What will they think of us if we do nothing today though? I am a bit concerned about that.

I would like to see some good will from my colleagues opposite so we can finally move forward.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: I have two questions, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to you and to Mr. Villemure for your clarifications.

My two questions are for you, Mr. Villemure.

First, you said that the witnesses who will be invited have already been informed. Who informed them? Can you tell us that? The committee has not had the time to talk about it so I would like to know who spoke on my behalf.

Secondly, I want to pick up on your clarification, Mr. Chair. You said "as soon as possible" and indicated that does not mean that we will hear from the witnesses within 48 hours. You said you would take the time to do things properly. That raises another question, however. To your mind, if this amendment is defeated, what would the deadline be for submitting the list of witnesses we want to invite to you and the clerk?

I expect we will do that as a committee and not on an individual basis.

Those are my two questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Before I carry on with the speaking list, I'm going to just weigh in again, since you're putting some of these points straight to me.

It had been my contention that, yes, “as soon as possible” meant that Wednesday would not have been possible, so that was my thought on that upon seeing the motion. It's why the notice went up today for Wednesday.

In the past, when a motion like this was adopted, I have asked parties immediately to supply witnesses. I always encourage parties or members to supply their witnesses to the analysts as soon as they can, and I tell them that the submission of witnesses need never be final. It's better to inform the analysts immediately if you know certain witnesses you wish to invite, and if you find another witness or discover a witness who's available to you, you can always follow up with the analysts. It has always been my practice to encourage the supplying of witness names as soon as possible, so that would be within a few days of the adoption of this motion, should it be adopted.

I think I covered your questions. I know that part of your intervention put questions to Monsieur Villemure, but I'm going to take my speakers in the order they are in on the list, and I'm going to take interventions only from those who wish to get on the list.

I have Ms. Saks next, if you've finished.

• (1725)

Hon. Greg Fergus: I have finished.

The Chair: Okay, then, we will go to Ms. Saks, and we'll see after that if we have anybody else who wishes to speak.

Go ahead, Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Fergus actually jumped ahead and clarified the question that I had—under the chair's interpretation, when witnesses would be due—and I appreciate the clarification that there is an openness to the ongoing submission of witnesses.

I want to defer to Monsieur Villemure, just for a moment. Respectfully, we sat here last week in camera on a motion as well, and there has certainly been ceding of time. I've always been happy to work across the floor with colleagues to make sure we get important issues tabled, and colleagues know that perfectly well.

Respect works both ways, and the way this was presented and the opportunity to work respectfully on this sadly did not feel... Certainly, I did not feel that it was put forward in my own collaborative efforts across the way. It's unfortunate that we've had to go through so many machinations of clarification today to ensure that the heart of the matter, as we proceed with this study, is clear—and the timeline, frankly, because there is other work on the docket that I would like to see accomplished.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any others who wish to speak to the amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: I would like a minor clarification from Mr. Villemure.

He has this in front of him. I don't think it will take long.

[*English*]

The Chair: I've given him the opportunity, as with all members.

Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: I would like to answer my esteemed colleague.

It is in fact the clerk's privilege to invite people. It is not René Villemure who invites a witness. On the other hand, before putting a name on the list, I show the courtesy of asking people if they would be willing to appear. In this case, they stated that they would be willing to join us, that is all. It is the clerk though who would make the invitation once the witness list is submitted to her.

[*English*]

The Chair: With that, we're on the amendment.

Are there any opposed to the amendment?

Mr. Matthew Green: What was the amendment?

Can you read it again?

The Chair: I will ask the clerk to read the amendment.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): The amendment is to delete the words “as soon as possible”.

Mr. Matthew Green: I oppose that.

The Chair: I hear a member opposed.

We'll go to a vote on the amendment.

It is tied, and I vote to oppose the amendment.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We are back on the main motion.

Are there any speakers to the main motion?

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks, Chair. I will say this really quickly. I understand that we're running out of time.

All of the points I raised today, and all of my little amendments were conversations that we could have had, had you guys felt that you could just talk to me. You could pick up the phone; you all have my number. We sit here together for hours and hours. We could have had a discussion about the substance of this. I am not opposed to our studying this. I raised my issues with you. We could have done it together. We could have bypassed all of this if we had been just a little more collaborative.

Again, I encourage members to work together, and in good faith. I have that good faith, and I hope that you do, too.

Thank you.

• (1730)

The Chair: Are there any others who would like to speak to the main motion?

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus

Hon. Greg Fergus: I want to support what Ms. Khalid said. I hope I'm not revealing anything from our in camera meeting; I'm pretty certain these were all in public. I think this is the third time she's raised this issue.

Folks, let's work together.

[*Translation*]

We can work together. We have shown that several times throughout this session. We have a good relationship. So I think it is possible.

Please take the time to communicate with us, with Ms. Khalid on our side, before tabling such a motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is anyone here opposed to the main motion?

I will ask for a vote on the main motion.

It is tied, and I vote in favour.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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