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Chair: Ms. Ruby Sahota



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• (1505)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 17 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Today is Wednesday, May 13, at 3 p.m. I know that during this pandemic some of us are losing track of our days and dates, so it's always good to have a reminder.

Today we're going to continue going through the draft report and hopefully adopting the recommendations. This is our last meeting, so we should be through all the recommendations by the end of today's meeting and have a final report that will then have any dissenting or supplementary opinions submitted by tomorrow, Thursday, at 5 p.m., with the translated version.

I want to remind members to make sure to unmute their mikes when they are about to speak.

Obviously we are going to have an informal meeting in order to have some discussion around adopting the report. Basically I'm in your hands as to how you'd like this to work.

I would suggest that we look at each recommendation separately and adopt it, reject it or rework it with a view to adopting it. Then we'll move on to the next recommendation and so on until we've considered each recommendation in the report. I hope this will allow members to debate and decide on the recommendations in an orderly and systematic fashion.

We obviously have no witnesses at today's meeting; however, I want to just let you know that we have received two letters from the Speaker as of late. We received one on May 11, which was brought up in yesterday's meeting, and we received one as of this morning, May 13. The letter was written to the House leader, Mr. Rodriguez, with the committee copied on the letter.

There was an attachment to this letter—four key procedural issues to consider and Standing Orders to consider—so I just want to make sure that everyone has had a chance to maybe look at that letter. You may wish to reference it today in making any suggestions or amendments to the recommendations. I want to alert you to that off the bat. Basically in the correspondence there is a limited number of possible amendments to the current Standing Orders. The Speaker is trying to provide a workable approach when addressing the issue of changing the Standing Orders, given the current circumstances, of course.

We're going to start where we left off yesterday, and that was in the discussion portion of our draft report. I know the clerk also informed us all earlier today that the edits, suggestions and comments that were provided yesterday have all been reworked by our analyst, Andre. They have been incorporated, but they're in translation currently so we don't have that current copy. We're going to be working off of the copy we had yesterday. The version two copy we had yesterday is what we'll be working off of. It has been recirculated today in case anybody needs to reprint it.

We're going to start on page 26.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Chair, can I ask a quick question?

The Chair: Absolutely. This is the best time for that.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Okay.

We did receive a copy of the Speaker's virtual chamber report. I just want to be really clear, though. It says on there that it is confidential, so I've definitely reviewed the document but I have not spoken about it because it is confidential. I am assuming that it's not part of this report. I just need clarity on that.

The Chair: Yes, I am assuming that has been written on there just because it was also on our draft report as well at first. I believe the Speaker has submitted it to us so that we can incorporate the suggestions, but we can hear from the clerk on how to move forward or what the right thing is to do in that circumstance.

Justin, there is a question about the letter from the Speaker being confidential.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive): Yes, hello, Ms. Blaney.

My understanding is that the Speaker and the Clerk's office wanted to share that material with the committee so that committee members would be aware of the contents of the letter as they begin to look at the recommendations for their own PROC report.

Some of the content from the Speaker's letter may be relevant to some of the recommendations that the various members of this committee have put forward, and it might be something to keep in mind as you are considering the draft recommendations today.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Sorry to be a stickler, but I'm going to be because I think what we're talking about really is important.

When I look at that report, one of the things that is said in it is that the administration consulted with more than 30 parliamentarians and collaborated closely with several who share similar requirements, co-testing solutions and so on. Are those parliamentarians Canadian parliamentarians? Are they international? I wasn't clear on that. If they are Canadian parliamentarians, what I understand, at least from the NDP, is that none of our members were included in this process.

One of the things I think is very important as we talk about a virtual Parliament is that working collaboratively together and respecting all the parties is even more important, because we're not in the same area or able to see what everyone is up to. I think it's important that we respect that and that our report reflects that quite honestly, so I need clarity on this as well.

I think one of my challenges right now is that we're getting information at the very last minute, and that makes it harder to get the report done. It puts a lot of stress on the analyst as well. I really agree with Mr. Turnbull. He brought this up yesterday, and I know it was a little bit of a discussion. I was on the other side of that, but it is a little bit hard to be discussing the future of our democracy in this sort of set-up and feel that I don't have all of the information to propose the best solutions.

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): I would like to clarify the following point.

The French version talks about a consultation with 30 parliamentarians and not with 30 parliamentarians.

What are we really talking about?

Is it parliaments or parliamentarians?

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I think you're right now that I read that, but still, it just says 30. I guess what I'm trying to say at the core of this—and thank you so much, Ms. Normandin, for that clarification—is that we don't know which 30 parliaments. I get this report, and what I really want to do is sit down with the Clerk and with the Speaker and ask more questions. I think it's really important, and I want to make sure that's on the record.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, I know there's a lot coming at us every day. There are some great recommendations that all of the parties have made. The NDP have made some great recommendations, which I was just suggesting to the clerk are very much in line with letting the House of Commons, the Speaker and their staff decide what Standing Orders we need to take a look at.

I know there are also many recommendations to continue the study after this report is submitted so that, into the future, the future of our democracy, we can take some real time to study them in depth and perhaps give the recommendations that we're able to give, knowing the evidence we have had before us so far in order to make some temporary solutions for this pandemic.

I'm going to put my participant list up on the side so I can see everybody. I'm sorry if I have overlooked anybody.

Mr. Alghabra, go ahead.

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Madam Chair, to Ms. Blaney's point, may I propose that we accept the fact, given how late this report has arrived, that we do not take it into account as evidence, at least for this report? The reality is that all of our work is done examining evidence, and while I'm sure the Speaker and his team have done tremendous work—and I think it would have been helpful had we received it earlier—we should accept and come to terms with the fact that it arrived on our desks a bit too late.

Maybe we should mention in the report that we haven't had a chance to review the recommendations and that this report is on a parallel track, but accept the fact that we were not able to incorporate it into this report.

The Chair: Your suggestion is well taken.

Next is Mr. Richards, please.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thank you.

I think Ms. Blaney actually raises a very good point, notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Alghabra just indicated that we wouldn't include anything in terms of quotes from other things like that in the report. I think she raises a really good point, and I think she was far too polite about it.

Without knowing who these members are, how are we to know that it wasn't just entirely or mostly the cabinet, for example? Maybe this is something that's being imposed upon the Speaker and is, therefore, something that we, as a committee, are being asked, essentially.... Whether we include anything in the report, we could be being pushed to recommend what the government wants, and by the government, I mean the cabinet. As a committee, we're being expected to rubber-stamp that, which would be completely and utterly inappropriate. I certainly hope that as we go through the course of today I'll be proven wrong about that, but I now have some suspicions.

When we start to talk about these letters, I can't even.... This goes back to one of the problems that we had previously. We also received another piece of correspondence from the Speaker not that long ago that was marked "confidential". I now, therefore, can't even talk about the contents of that letter, but it was also of importance. Here we are in public, and we can't reveal anything about that letter, so we can't even discuss that. We're being asked to discuss selective portions. Why was this one not confidential? Why was that one confidential? It raises a lot of questions, and I hope the answers aren't what they appear to be. Those are my thoughts on that.

I will also make the suggestion, Madam Chair, that maybe a wise way.... You talk about trying to go through these recommendations from the perspective of finding ways to adopt them. The problem is that they're on various different places on the map. A good starting point might be for each of us, whether it be as individual members or as one person from each of the parties, to give some indication of where we're hoping to end up at the end of the day. That might actually help us get some sense of how to deal with these various recommendations, rather than just shooting all over the map on things. It might be better for each party or each individual to give some sense of where they're hoping to end up at the end of the day. That would probably be a very good starting point.

• (1515)

The Chair: I definitely hear you. Both you and Ms. Blaney raised good points about the suggestions that have come from the Speaker. I think Mr. Alghabra also raised a good point: that the committee could decide to not look at that since most of our recommendations are already written and have been submitted since the weekend. We had a clear understanding—at least before any of these letters really got to us.... We had already created our recommendations from what we had heard from the witnesses. This was before the first letter that the Speaker sent and the second letter in which we were asked to submit our recommendations to the clerk so that they could be incorporated into the draft report. We could just work off that, really. What I intend to do today is to work from that.

I'm sure the committee members will probably start getting a better idea of where people want to be. I may be understanding this incorrectly, but I think the recommendations are slotted in a systematic way in the appropriate sections. For some, we can debate which section they should be in. I think, from being able to read through myself.... When I read through the Bloc, the NDP, the Liberal and the CPC recommendations, it gave me a better idea of where the different parties were—just by doing that alone.

I may not be understanding you, Mr. Richards, as to why there is no understanding of what the wishes of the different parties and the different members are.

Mr. Blake Richards: You may view it somewhat differently than I do.

I've looked through the recommendations. I think I have a reasonable sense, maybe, of the other opposition parties and where they might be. I'm not as clear on where the government is, per se. A lot of the recommendations that I'm seeing from the government side are more along the lines of what we would do going forward and those kinds of things. We're not really here to talk about that. I'm really quite unclear on where the government hopes to end up. It would be really good to get some clarity on that, because it would help us determine how we might be able to work together on common ground. If we don't know that, then it's hard to do that.

The Chair: That's fair.

I'm going to take just the hands that are raised at this point, and then we will start with the recommendations. As we go through the recommendations, I think that clarification can be provided by whomever is speaking about the recommendation. They can let you know. I'm sure there are going to be some amendments along the

way, in order to make sure we are talking about what is at hand and that it's clear in each recommendation what we want to look at in the future and what we want to adopt now.

Mr. Brassard, you're next, and then Ms. Petitpas Taylor and Mr. Turnbull. After that, we'll begin on the recommendations.

• (1520)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

As I look at these recommendations, and I think I expressed this concern yesterday, the generalized sense of what these recommendations look like is that many of them are forward looking, perhaps beyond what the mandate of the committee is with respect to this study. I went through it again and I want to make this clear. It is important that we all get a sense of what we would like to see in this, and those recommendations are disjointed, in my view.

I go back to the original motion that was put before the House, the House order on April 11. It is:

(m) the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to study ways in which members can fulfill their parliamentary duties while the House stands adjourned on account of public health concerns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the temporary modification of certain procedures, sittings in alternate locations and technological solutions including a virtual Parliament, provided that (i) during the period the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order, the provisions applying to committees enumerated in paragraph (l) shall also apply to the committee, however, the committee may consider motions related to the adoption of a draft report in relation to this topic, (ii) the committee be instructed to present a report no later than May 15, 2020, (iii) any report which is adopted pursuant to subparagraph (ii) may be deposited electronically with the Clerk of the House, and shall be deemed to have been duly presented to the House on that date;

The rest of the motion talks about receiving evidence.

From my standpoint right now, we need to look at this on a macro level. Many of these recommendations look beyond what our mandate is. Given the time to study this properly, we can push this off to study further a little later on.

What we're dealing with right now are recommendations on the current crisis. Of course, we've seen evidence, even when we first started this study on April 16, that things are starting to change significantly right across the country. There are legislatures, as we know, that are opening up. Businesses have been opened. There are several more businesses that are opening. People are working. I think that, at a minimum, what we need to do today, as we go forward with these recommendations, is to set and be the example of what is happening and what is reflective across this country.

It doesn't necessarily mean the fact that all 338 of us are going to come back, but I think the basis of our recommendations needs to reflect how Parliament is going to function, function as we're used to, whether or not that's a hybrid model of Parliament. We have to get back to some sense of normalcy where there is a level of accountability that occurs. The place to make that happen is in the House of Commons, but there are options available to us. As we narrow down these recommendations, we really need to focus on how we're going to function properly.

As the House sits now, it's adjourned, but obviously, May 25 is coming up, when the House is expected to reconvene. That should be our sole focus. Any talk about the future of Parliament, changing the Standing Orders and all of that stuff, we can deal with at a later date. The basis of this motion is in relation to the COVID-19 crisis. I think all of us can agree that has evolved greatly over the course of the last couple of months. We're in a position right now where we, as leaders in this country, should be making recommendations to Parliament that we get back to a sense of normalcy.

I'm not talking about full normalcy in terms of Parliament, but some sense of normalcy to show that leadership and to make sure that Parliament is functioning and that it's functioning well, and that there is a level of accountability that exists. I think that is well within our mandate. Looking beyond to the future, as many of these recommendations do, we can do later.

• (1525)

Right now, let's stick to what we are mandated to do and make sure that we come out of this with recommendations to Parliament that will allow us to function.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Madam Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll be very brief as well. I simply want to make a point of clarification for the record.

Mr. Richards indicated in his statement that the letter that was provided by the Speaker indicated that the administration had consulted with 30 members of Parliament or cabinet per se.

I want to quote the paragraph in that letter. It states:

The Administration consulted with more than 30 parliaments and collaborated closely with several who share similar requirements....

Then it continues on from there.

It's very important, for the record, for Canadians to know that the consultation was done with international parliaments as opposed to parliamentarians here in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

As just a brief comment here, I appreciated Ms. Blaney's comments stressing the importance of collaboration. I really think if we have this broader discussion, as Mr. Brassard and Mr. Richards are suggesting we have, we'll get hung up in a broader debate rather than focusing specifically on the task at hand, which is clearly to finish this report.

All the parties have put forward their best foot in terms of providing specific recommendations based on the testimony, and I see a lot of alignment in most of those recommendations. They're specific. From my perspective, most of them are actually focused on what we were tasked to do. They're forward looking, of course, as I think it would be not as useful to only look backwards at this time.

We're really talking about how Parliament can continue to function at a time such as this, which is forward looking.

Therefore, we need to push forward and really focus on what we're here to do, which is to find a way forward on finalizing these recommendations.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Normandin, go ahead.

Ms. Christine Normandin: I will also be brief.

I don't think it is pointless to make a few projections, especially since testimony has come from other parliaments that already had certain rules established to make it possible to hold a virtual vote or a virtual Parliament. Had our procedural rules included those kinds of provisions, we would have proceeded more quickly.

Considering that we have indirectly discussed amending our procedural rules to make it possible for Parliament to operate virtually, I don't think it would be pointless to make recommendations, so that we could later adopt a parallel set of procedural rules. I think that is indirectly part of our mandate. We would have been more prepared to operate had our procedural rules provided for the holding of a virtual Parliament.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I think this was good. It was a good discussion to get us started, and it probably gives us all a frame of thought in which to discuss these recommendations. Therefore, I'm hoping that the members will be able to provide clarity when we go through the recommendations so that it satisfies some of these concerns that have been mentioned.

We're going to start with "LIB 1". I want to get a bit of feedback. I'm going to see if we have consensus on this, and then we might have to move to a vote if I can't get a clear picture of whether the committee would like to adopt this recommendation.

Is there any discussion on LIB 1?

Ms. Blaney.

• (1530)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I personally think LIB 1, BQ 10 and NDP 2 should be somehow put together.

Also, the better spot for this would actually be in section B, on page 47 of the document I'm working from, about future work. One of the things that I feel is very important from the NDP recommendation is the agreement of all recognized parties. That's an important part for me.

The Chair: In the last committee meeting, we started on this. You're absolutely right. I had mentioned that LIB 1, BQ 10 and NDP 2 have a lot of similarities and could be grouped together. The analyst has also included all of these recommendations on page 48, where you have suggested they might be better placed. It's up to the committee to decide. Obviously, they're already slotted in there. We could remove them from the front.

If, first, I could get some discussion on perhaps combining these recommendations, then we can decide on where the recommendations should go.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I completely agree with Ms. Blaney. I really see the merits in the three recommendations she mentioned. I think they could be combined. I have some suggested rewording for that. I thought about this in advance and thought maybe the committee would be amenable to a combined recommendation.

Can I put that forward now, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Turnbull. Could you read the recommendation?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I would suggest the wording be "That the House establish an alternative set of standing orders which enables the implementation of a virtual Parliament so that the House can continue with its business in the event of a crisis or exceptional circumstance such as those arising from the current pandemic." Then I would add a sentence: "The committee further recommends these modified standing orders only come into force and be rescinded at the agreement of all recognized parties."

This includes the NDP's...the strength, I think, of Ms. Blaney's comment that "the agreement of all recognized parties" be included. It includes elements of the wording from the Bloc's recommendation, which I found very compelling, and it also stays true to, I think, the spirit of the LIB 1 recommendation, which I think there's a large degree of agreement on, based on their wording.

That's what I would suggest. Thanks.

The Chair: Okay.

There is an order here, but I was wondering, Ms. Blaney, if you wanted to....

You have your hand up as well, so I will call on you, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, my hand was originally up to comment on the main recommendation, but also on the related one, too, which has already been identified as very similar.

I made some similar comments last meeting, but I'll just refresh folks' memories. I think the new suggestion, amendment, or however you want to term it, that Mr. Turnbull just made actually runs even more contrary to the concerns that I had previously. I won't dig it out and read it myself, although I do have it here somewhere. Mr. Brassard, just minutes ago, read to the entire committee the terms of reference that we were given in the order of reference from the House. It was quite clear that what we were to study was this current situation and how the House of Commons can function and continue to serve the people while the House stands adjourned. It

does not anywhere in there indicate that we are to look at the future and what might be done in future situations like this one.

There's probably a very good reason for that. I can't speak to the thought process that was in mind, but I can imagine what it would be, and I would certainly share that thought process. It's that you don't look at what you can learn from a situation while you're right in the middle of it. You deal with the situation that you have at hand. You do your best to function through it and continue on in the best way that you can. Then, in hindsight, following the end of a crisis, that's when you typically look back and ask, "What did we do right? What did we do wrong? What could we do differently if we have another instance of something like this?" Then you make those kinds of recommendations.

We're still in the middle of this. We don't know how this is all going to play out. We're doing the best we can to try to function through it. That is the focus that we've been given, and I think it's the wise focus for us right now: to focus on the current situation at hand. Then, following that, if we choose as a committee to study what we might do in the future—and I think it might be a good idea that we do that—it would be something that we would do fully informed, having seen how this all played out, what circumstances arose and what unintended consequences there might have been from the actions we've taken.

Therefore, it would be not only contrary to what we've been told to do by the House, but also ill advised and a mistake to make these kinds of recommendations at this point. I, therefore, would be strongly opposed to the idea that we make these kinds of recommendations now. It's not necessarily that they might not be good recommendations in the future, but this is not our focus now and it should not be.

● (1535)

The Chair: Your opposition is noted, but I'm a bit confused because we were asked to study how to create a virtual Parliament so that members could continue to do their work.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, I was not going to raise this today. I was maybe going to have a private conversation with you at another date, but I think maybe it is necessary because it might be helpful for us to move forward today in a timely and orderly fashion.

I really think that, in your role as chair, you are participating and engaging in debate far too much. I think that you should examine what your role should be as a chair and consider whether it is helpful for debate. Your role is to facilitate debate, not to participate in it. I say this with the best intentions. I really think you should consider that, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay. I can see where you're coming from, absolutely. I have felt a need to interject at some points. I will try to do that less.

At the beginning of each meeting, I generally used to go through the motion, the order of reference that we were given by the House of Commons. In today's meeting and in the last meeting, I chose not to do so because we didn't have any witnesses or, necessarily, any new members. However, I'm trying to point back to the statement that I would have made at the beginning of the meeting, reminding us of what we were tasked to do, and virtual Parliament was one of the prongs listed.

There is a recommendation that, going through the report later on, we might want to bring this up again. It talks about future studies and visions. A virtual Parliament is part of the order of reference.

I agree with some of your other points, for sure. Let's hear from the other committee members as to where they stand on it.

Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a question with regard to Mr. Turnbull's recommendation. I expressed yesterday, and I think earlier, the concern around what defines "extraordinary circumstances". We're in the height of a COVID-19 pandemic. Parliament and the House leaders have deemed that to be an extraordinary circumstance. That's why the House is adjourned.

I have a couple of questions, through you, Madam Chair, to Mr. Turnbull, because LIB 1 does mention "a fully functioning virtual Parliament". What would be Mr. Turnbull's idea of "a fully functioning virtual Parliament"? That would be my first question, Madam Chair, to Mr. Turnbull.

• (1540)

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, would you like to answer that before we move on to Mr. Duncan?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, I'd be happy to.

What we've heard in testimony is that many of the deliberative functions of Parliament have been replicated in a virtual setting so far. What we heard from the Speaker's testimony, and others' testimony, was that there were decision-making functions of Parliament that were not completely happening at the moment. In the recommendation it implies that a virtual Parliament would try to replicate as many of the functions of Parliament...which is what we've been asked to study, how Parliament can continue to function and parliamentarians can continue to fulfill their roles and duties. I think what we've heard in testimony is that an alternative set of standing orders is actually something that's been recommended by several witnesses. I don't think this is reaching in any way.

The other thing about exceptional circumstances that I will say is that I think there are extraordinary, exceptional and emergency circumstances. There's a little difference in language but I think the spirit in all is referring to the same thing. Part of the job of creating an alternative set of standing orders in the future would also be to create the criteria of those exceptional circumstances, define what that means and define how this set of standing orders would be triggered by parties through some sort of majority vote. I think that is largely what was recommended by at least one witness, as I remember, and it seems to me it is a perfectly reasonable way to move for-

ward. I don't think we have to have a be-all and end-all definition right now of "extraordinary circumstances", or even the criteria at the moment. We know a pandemic is included, but there may be quite a number of other emergencies—second waves of a pandemic, third waves, etc.—that could be included as extraordinary circumstances.

Thank you.

Mr. John Brassard: I appreciate that clarification, Mr. Turnbull.

Through you, Madam Chair, again to Mr. Turnbull, currently under the committee structure that we've been using, we've now been seeing virtual sittings on Tuesday and Thursday, and we've also seen an in-person sitting on Wednesday. Is that the idea of what would constitute a virtual Parliament in this situation or...? Again, the challenge that I have is that there's really not a clear definition of "virtual Parliament". Our paradigm of what it is is what exists today, but we've also heard and seen evidence around the world, particularly in the Westminster system, where a hybrid Parliament can replicate more so the type of virtual Parliament.... Perhaps if it's good enough for Westminster then it's good enough for us.

I'm just trying to find out the paradigm of what a virtual Parliament should look like in the context of this recommendation, and I say that through you, Madam Chair, to Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: The way I would answer that is based on the witness testimony and Samara report, which I think includes the acknowledgement that there's a continuum that most parliaments seem to be on, nationally speaking. They seem to be moving from very limited functions. The easiest to replicate virtually seems to be committee meetings, because they're smaller and they're easier to replicate in a virtual setting, so I think that has been the natural place that most have started. It seems that they're moving along a continuum to more special scrutiny sessions, or I think that's what they've been called, similar to the special committee sessions we've had on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which are two-hour "question period" sorts of sessions, but they're not formal proceedings of the House.

Moving along that continuum, we'd see more fulsome debates such as what we would see in the House of Commons in the physical setting being replicated virtually, with the opportunity for electronic and remote voting that could also be implemented and included in an incremental way, which is what we've seen in the U.K.

• (1545)

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I have one more question, through you to Mr. Turnbull again.

The recommendation you're proposing requires that all parties would have to agree that a crisis is over. This is why I need clarification from you, and if I'm wrong, correct me, please.

There could be a scenario where the governing party doesn't agree that a crisis is over, and they might not want to return for whatever reason. I'm certainly not suggesting this in the current government, but this could be problematic in moving forward if in fact public health agencies determine that a crisis is over and the World Health Organization decides that, but we have a political party that decides that the crisis is not over for parliamentary purposes.

How do you suggest we resolve that potential conflict?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It's a good question—

The Chair: I'll let you finish, but I just want to point out, in case nobody is looking at the speakers list, that Ms. Blaney is up next to speak as well. I think the wording was from NDP 2, so she might have some more insight too.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, these are legitimate questions that need to be asked, which we would be asking in a normal committee setting. I just want to make that clear. These are serious concerns that I have.

The Chair: I think these issues have been brought up even in our questioning, so this is a good conversation.

Mr. Turnbull, did you still want to reply to that?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Sure. I can think of a whole host of ways to solve that problem. Being a solutions-oriented person, I'm asking, how we could use more data in terms of those decision-making processes and have those required as part of the decisions that were made.

In terms of the wording I suggested, I was repurposing and trying to come to a collaborative solution, based on wording from the various parties.

The issue you raise is a good one. Maybe there should be a majority vote instead of agreement of all recognized parties. That might help, or in lieu of that, maybe looking at how the definition of an extraordinary or exceptional circumstance could also include clauses or criteria for how those standing orders could be rescinded, or how the opposite of triggering, going back to normal House proceedings, could integrate scientific evidence.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I think this debate and discussion is very important. We are talking about something very fundamental as we go through this process.

First of all, I did my best to write down everything Mr. Turnbull said. If you have any wording, I would love to see it. The only part that I want to make sure is very clear.... I agree that the extraordinary circumstances could be clarified in the modified standing orders. I'm sure there are ways we can do that.

The reason why I think it's important that we have all parties participate in this is that, if we look at what's happened in Canada and in other countries, COVID-19 came very quickly. We had to make decisions very rapidly. We've done that with the four recognized parties working through their House officers to make decisions. It gives everybody a little bit of power to make those decisions. I

think Canadians appreciate that level of collaboration and accountability. I think that's important.

I certainly recognize that if there are concerns about the governing party perhaps extending that, we can have some discussions about how to address that. I think every party understands that we are accountable to Canadians. If we're doing something untoward, that's going to be something that's in the public record pretty quickly. I know that, as an opposition party member, I'm certainly not shy about mentioning when I feel the governing party is stepping out of line.

For me, one of the things that are important about this is, like I said earlier, that we stepped out. We were doing the best that we could with the information that we had, but there was no structure. I think that moving forward it would be good to have some sort of structure so that if anything like this happens again, parliamentarians have something to look at.

• (1550)

The Chair: Okay.

Madam Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Perhaps I am the only one who feels that the debate is somewhat futile, as, according to my understanding, in order for us to hold a virtual Parliament, the procedural rules need to be changed, and that requires unanimous consent from the parties.

Whether we like it or not, we will have a new set of procedural rules. When it's time to apply them, we will either agree now in saying that it will require the consent of all the parties, or we will later amend the procedural rules unanimously to do that.

I think the work is already done, in a way. I feel like we are sort of going in circles in this debate.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think the best way is for the House to adopt extraordinary measures and for the House to adopt a decision to declare that the extraordinary circumstances have passed. There's nothing more transparent than a public vote.

I understand where Ms. Blaney is coming from, and I really want to see us achieve all-party agreement, but I think all-party agreement could imply agreements behind the scenes. A public vote will hold every member of Parliament accountable to their constituents on how they voted to adopt those extraordinary measures or how they voted against the adoption of extraordinary measures. It empowers the House of Commons. It empowers all MPs to vote for it, instead of the leadership of the parties.

The Chair: Is that a proposal for further amendment to the amendment that was proposed? I guess that would be....

After this, we'll hear from Mr. Duncan.

Ryan, would you be able to read out your amalgamated recommendation that comes from the ideas in LIB 1, BQ 10 and NDP 2? Then, I don't know if you consider this to be a friendly addition to that or a modification to it.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I do. Yes, I would.

Maybe after we hear from Mr. Duncan.... I'm interested to hear what he has to say, as always.

The Chair: Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Turnbull and Madam Chair.

I hate to belabour the point. This is me as a newbie rookie here, and I apologize. This is an observation.

I know Mr. Richards and Mr. Brassard were talking about the high-level discussion. We're talking about the Standing Orders right now, but for me, reading this over, with our wanting to get the collaboration and get as much consensus as we can, I'm having some concerns or some questions about virtual Parliament. What is it exactly? It is 100% virtual. Is there a hybrid? I think there is some merit in having a discussion of how we can go back and forth on that a little. I think it's a good compromise. Just as we're going through, we don't deal with the hybrid model until later at the end.

I know we're trying to get done by six o'clock, and I'll wrap this up. I just think there are some things where, to me, changing the Standing Orders, knowing that's the direction we're going in, there is some balance to that. There are some safety measures, of course, that are in that. I think it balances the members, like Ms. Blaney and Ms. Petitpas Taylor, who very appropriately talk about their struggles in the current context of being able to get back to Ottawa. For those in a small number, whatever is deemed safe by the appropriate health and safety part of the House administration....

I just think these high-level conversations might actually expedite a conclusion to a lot of these things. If that's a no-go and that's an area where the majority don't want to go, okay, but I really think that could actually help make our report better, give some recommendations and build on them. I have several reasons as to why I think in the short term and in the long term a hybrid option is good to getting us back safely, at some point down the road, to our regular times, whenever that may be.

I'll just leave it at that. As we go through that bit by bit, we're going to have this trouble, I think. I'm struggling with it, frankly.

Thank you.

• (1555)

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Alhabra.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: I want to comment on Mr. Duncan's point. I'm not going to quibble with the order of recommendations because that may make sense if we start.

The intent here is to recommend that the House of Commons prepare itself to be able to conduct its business fully virtually under emergency circumstances, and then it recommends that in the

meantime it does the hybrid model. It doesn't necessarily mean that maybe we will never use a fully virtual Parliament, but what it means is that if we one day come to that point, we need the House of Commons to be prepared. It doesn't recommend when we must use it fully virtually. It doesn't say today or tomorrow. It just recommends that today, in the meantime, another recommendation is the hybrid model. It says we ask the administration to prepare itself for being fully virtual one day when the House decides we need to go fully virtual.

The Chair: I think you're referencing LIB 2 there, so the difference between the first section.... Yes, we can decide to put this at the end, on page 48 or 49, where the analyst also has it and Ms. Blaney has suggested.

Mr. Turnbull, are you able to package this all up, everything that's been discussed, in one recommendation?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: To Ms. Alhabra's point, and in response to Mr. Duncan, I really do feel that the hybrid model is a great interim solution, but developing capacity for a fully virtual Parliament is what most of us want to recommend.

I've reworded the initial suggestion that I put forward. I think there is a friendly amendment here that's emerging, and I appreciate all the input and all the really good questions. Do you want me to read that out now so we can get that on the record?

The Chair: Yes. Could you read it very slowly?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Will do.

One thing I wanted to also mention before I read it out is that the Standing Orders don't necessarily require unanimous consent, I believe. I think it's a majority vote that can change the Standing Orders. I just want to put that in context.

Here is what I would propose: "That the House establish an alternative set of standing orders which enables the implementation of a virtual Parliament so that the House can continue with its business in the event of a crisis or exceptional circumstance such as those arising from the current pandemic. The committee further recommends these modified standing orders only come into force and be rescinded by a majority vote in the House of Commons."

The Chair: Some hands have gone up, but I was going to say, perhaps now we could get a sense of who is in support of this recommendation. It would be one of the recommendations either in this section or at the end, and we have a couple more to go through, CPC 2 and NDP 1, which weren't amalgamated into this.

Mr. Alhabra, did you put your hand up again? Okay, it was from before.

We'll go to Mr. Duncan, and then Mr. Richards.

• (1600)

Mr. Eric Duncan: Madam Chair, I've been a head of council and mayor before and I feel as though I'm one of those really annoying councillors who goes off topic when there is an amendment, so in good faith I will hold and just continue the conversation on the virtual Parliament. We'll deal with the amendment specifically and then maybe have that conversation about the theme of the report, which I have some comments on in terms of a constructive way forward.

I'll stop there. We'll deal with this, and I'll put my hand back up when this one is dealt with.

The Chair: We'll all be interested to hear it. Any advice can be helpful.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I wouldn't go so far as to say I have "grave concerns" about this amendment, but as I've already indicated, I'm not a fan of the recommendation to begin with. Mainly I'm not a fan of the recommendation because I still strongly feel that it's outside the scope of our report. When you are looking at future situations, it should not be done in the context of dealing with the current situation.

I won't belabour that. I won't reiterate all of it any more than to say that.

The amendment is a very dangerous place to be going. I can understand and appreciate from Mr. Turnbull's perspective why he might not share those concerns, but I will just lay it out. The way it works, right now, we are in a minority Parliament. I've had the benefit, if you want to call it that, of having served in all four different ways you can serve in Parliament. I've served in a government minority. I've served in a government that was a majority. I've served in an opposition that was opposed to a majority, and I'm now serving in a minority Parliament as an opposition member. Therefore, I've seen all the different ways that a parliament can function.

One can understand in a minority Parliament, which is obviously the only experience Mr. Turnbull has had, why potentially there isn't as much concern about the type of motion he just made in terms of this amendment, but I've served on both sides of a majority, and a majority that was certainly accused by members of Mr. Turnbull's party and others, and I know if he spoke to some of his members who served during that time period, they would probably say they would have been horrified to imagine the government having the power to do this.

I had the benefit or the experience of serving in opposition to the current Prime Minister and saw a number of things that I was quite concerned about in terms of the behaviours of the Prime Minister looking to gain extra powers for himself to avoid accountability. For that reason, I would be horrified to imagine his having the powers of a majority vote, if he had a majority government once again, to invoke something such as this. We should all consider, wherever we sit right now, whether we are government or opposition, or what type of experience we've had as members of Parliament, that this type of thing can be incredibly dangerous.

I don't want to risk seeming like a conspiracy theorist in any way, but these kinds of things, these kinds of powers to declare these

kinds of situations without having to have other parties in agreement, are what lead to democracies being eroded to the point where they are no longer democracies. I won't get into grand examples of that happening in the past, but certainly there are examples. We should all be incredibly cautious and incredibly reluctant to go down this very dangerous road.

I expressed my opposition to the initial recommendation that was being made here on the fly. However, should the majority of the committee want to go there, that's obviously what we will do. This one is so incredibly dangerous that, let's put it this way, I would be prepared to speak in opposition to this for as long as I have to, to convince others that this is a very dangerous road, if that's what is required. It is incredibly dangerous.

On the main recommendation itself without this amendment, I am still opposed because I think it's a mistake. However, I would not feel the need to go down that path in order to prevent it.

It is so important that we protect our democracy that I would be prepared to go to any length to prevent this from happening.

• (1605)

The Chair: You definitely have a lot of experience, Mr. Richards. Even though we've had our tiffs, it has been an honour to serve alongside you, at least in two Parliaments so far.

At the end, you said—and I'm just trying to clarify before we move on to Ms. Blaney, who I think could help out here—you are still opposed to the original, the original being LIB 1, I'm assuming. However, you are not as opposed to that. This, you think, is a lot more problematic, the new version.

Mr. Blake Richards: To clarify, what I was referring to is the motion that we're debating now, I guess, that was made on the floor by Mr. Turnbull. Then he, of course, made a suggestion to amend his own motion, and the amendment is to allow something to be done by a majority vote, rather than by all parties being in agreement on [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] measure. That is what I was referring to as being incredibly dangerous.

I still disagree with his main motion, but although my objections are there, the main motion is not one that I would go to any length to protect democracy from. If that's the will of the committee and I just happen to be in opposition to the majority of the committee, that's where dissenting reports are an option.

On something fundamental that could actually lead to the very erosion of our democracy, like what Mr. Turnbull has suggested now with this amendment, I will go to any lengths to prevent that from happening.

The Chair: Sorry. I think I added more time on there. I'm trying to get through this. I think if we—

Mr. Blake Richards: I am too. I just wanted to point out that this is how strongly I feel about this one.

The Chair: Yes, and I wanted clarity as to what you had said so that we all understand.

Ms. Blaney, you are next.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just to be absolutely clear, I do not agree with the vote. I want to see all parties working together. I think this is absolutely imperative, and we've demonstrated the capacity to do that over the last couple of months. I agree with Mr. Richards. If you're in a majority government, it really gives away all the power to the governing party, and it does not acknowledge the members of our country who have voted for other parties.

Also, I just want to reiterate that I still think this should be moved further along in the report under "B. Future work". I'm just offering that as another moment of consideration as it could move it a little further down and allow us to take some time to contemplate it and work on some of the other recommendations.

The Chair: My understanding of that was that this was probably not going to be as contentious an issue, and that after having adopted, rejected or amended them, we could have the analyst just move them further along.

I think we've made a lot of headway here. I'd hate to now pass by this without either going to a vote or getting an understanding of where we all are on this. I think we're too far in now to really leave it. That's just my feeling right now. I'd hate all this to go for...and then we forget later on what we discussed.

To clarify, the original amendment that Mr. Turnbull made with regard to all-party agreement, would you be in support of that, Ms. Blaney, that amalgamated suggestion? Is it just the majority vote that you're opposed to?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: The majority vote I am very against. As for the rest of it, I think I would support it. I still don't have all of the language. I tried to write it down. I know that other people are faster writers than I, so I did my best. I think that I support it, and the intention of it I support 100%, but I want to see the exact wording.

The Chair: That's excellent. That gives us a better understanding.

Mr. Alhabra, can you help with that? I was going to go to Mr. Turnbull to see if... I want to get a sense of whether there was a friendly amendment made to the new recommendation, whether you're willing to go back to the amalgamated recommendation that was made, or whether you want to keep it at a majority vote. Then, also, if we could get the clear language for Ms. Blaney again...

• (1610)

Hon. Omar Alhabra: I think there is a reasonable amount of confusion about what we're discussing now, given the various versions of the recommendations that we've discussed.

I just want to comment on the issue of threat to democracy in majority government. Majority governments or any other Parliament conduct their business always with a vote. The state of emergency in the province of Ontario, my province, was adopted by a vote. It did not require all recognized and unrecognized parties to talk behind the scenes to agree about their opinions. In my opinion, a state of a emergency is much more invasive and it suspends democracy a lot more than what a standing order does and doesn't do. We can pass in various provinces, and maybe perhaps the same way at the federal level, the declaration of a state of emergency through a vote of the various legislatures. Therefore, I'm confused

as to how that is much less invasive or a risk to democracy than adopting a set of standing orders that enables Parliament to do its job in various approaches.

I want to remind everybody that we're talking here about extraordinary circumstances, just like a circumstance in which provinces have decided to use a state of emergency. We don't see provinces, day in and day out, declare a state of emergency and use their majority to abuse their power. That's not what happens. In fact, Parliament and MPs, MLAs and MNAs are held accountable to their constituents. They know they couldn't do something unreasonable such as that, and we all work in that context.

I'm just confused by all this hyperbole I'm hearing.

The Chair: At this point, Mr. Brassard has a comment too. I'll see if Mr. Brassard gives me permission to move it in this direction, but I was hoping we could get the final wording one more time, perhaps move to a vote on this recommendation, and then move past what the first recommendation would be.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, on a point of order, there is a speakers list on this item.

The Chair: I'm going to move on to the speakers list. That is what I was saying. I just want to throw the thought out there that, after dealing with the speakers, I would like to move in this direction if possible, if allowed by the members of the committee. That's the statement I'm making right now.

If you allow me to, if Mr. Brassard, who is next on the speakers list, allows me to move in this direction, I will then ask Mr. Turnbull to read out the amended recommendation. This will be the first recommendation of the report, and then we'll move to that.

Mr. Blake Richards: On that, I'll make it really clear right now. Don't have any plans for a vote if Mr. Turnbull refuses to pull this amendment, the second amendment that he has made, in terms of the majority vote. Don't make any plans for a vote. Buckle up, because we won't be having any vote today. I will not allow this to go forward if it looks in any way as though it's going to pass.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: I'm really concerned about Mr. Turnbull's proposed amendment with respect to the majority vote. I will tell you why. Effectively the problem with what he is proposing, and I want all the members to consider this, is that if in fact, under these extraordinary circumstances, a movement to a fully functioning virtual Parliament occurs, in the event of a majority government, whether it's Liberal, Conservative, NDP or Bloc, the majority government could by vote move Parliament into a chat room.

You think about that. You think about the impact that might have. I know Mr. Alhabra is laughing right now, but that's effectively what Mr. Turnbull's motion is proposing. That's not the way it should work. There has to be consensus.

The reverse of that is the concern I expressed before.

Listen, if there's any reason that needs to be determined as to why, when we're under the gun like this with a deadline of six o'clock today to come through this, when we're talking about things that should be talked about in future studies, this is a perfect example of it. With amendments on the fly and the impact that some of what's being proposed has on Parliament, on our democracy going forward, this is a perfect example of why the May 15 deadline, and certainly the six o'clock deadline tonight, are problematic.

I suggest as well that on the reverse of that, as I mentioned earlier, if one party agrees that we are not going to come out of this crisis and resume Parliament, that puts us in almost an equal position as we are in right now, where a majority government can propose that we end up moving into a virtual chat room.

I don't know how we're going to resolve this. Certainly Mr. Turnbull's proposed amendment on this doesn't address what I think is a very valid concern of the potential abuse of Parliament by a majority government to move us into a virtual setting.

Quite frankly, I don't understand why, with respect to this recommendation, we would even be discussing it in the context of the current crisis. This is something that needs to be addressed and discussed later on in further studies.

Like Mr. Richards, who I know has a lot more experience around here than I do in terms of the way Parliament functions, I am frankly concerned about this amendment and the impact, as I said, for a majority government to simply put us into a chat room. That should be concerning to all members of Parliament, especially those on the committee here, on a going-forward basis.

• (1615)

The Chair: Would you rather the recommendation not refer to how to rescind at all, or rescinding should be done by a majority, but implementing the virtual Parliament should be done by all parties?

I'm just trying to understand whether we can approve things, to try to get more consensus, or at least not as much opposition to it. Is that what I'm hearing, that it's the rescind part that is also problematic, so maybe the rescinding could be removed?

Mr. John Brassard: I don't know how, frankly, we're going to land on an agreement given the fact that we're under the gun here on what constitutes an agreement, whether it's an all-party agreement or whether it's a majority vote. I don't know how we're going to land there in the context of what we're studying today. Maybe we need to move this particular part of the recommendation forward for a future study and then deal with it in the context of the COVID-19 crisis that we're dealing with today, Madam Chair.

I think we're almost putting the cart before the horse with respect to what a future Parliament might look like. We've talked about virtual Parliament before. What does a virtual Parliament look like? Well, we have a virtual Parliament as it exists today, but maybe a hybrid model or something to that effect is something that we should be talking about as opposed to.... Maybe that should be our recommendation. We're going to recommend to Parliament that we move to a hybrid model as opposed to dealing with a fully functioning virtual Parliament with extraordinary circumstances and trying to define that with our backs up against the wall, with a six o'clock

deadline—an hour and forty minutes from now—with many relevant questions that need to be answered on this.

My concern is that we put forward a set of recommendations that really are not reflective of what we should be doing as this committee. That's where I'm at. I have a problem with many of these recommendations in that they're almost too forward-looking, given the context of what we were mandated to study right now.

• (1620)

The Chair: This is causing me to want to be even more forward-looking and maybe take Ms. Blaney's suggestion to move past this. I don't know where we would be, because I feel as though if I turn the page, we're probably going to get stuck again on the first recommendation in the next section.

We will hear from Mr. Richards and then Madame Normandin.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, I'll start by saying that I think what we're experiencing right now is further proof that going down this path of trying to recommend things for future crises in the middle of a crisis, when our direction has simply been to figure out how to get through this current situation, with the short window of time we've been given to do it and, as Mr. Brassard says, when we are under the gun essentially, at this point, is a great mistake.

I think that's why these recommendations are a great mistake. Here we are, with an hour and forty minutes to try to finish recommendations about how to deal with the current situation and we're fighting over what we're going to do in some future situation that might arise instead of dealing with what we're supposed to be dealing with. I'm going to tell you that we could be here a long time, because I will never allow our democracy to be given away this way. That's what we're talking about here with this amendment Mr. Turnbull is proposing to his own recommendation. The bottom line here is that if all the other committee members, or at least all the other parties, feel that's where we're going to go, I guess that's where we're going to go, but I will not, I will never, allow our democracy to be taken away in such a fashion. That amendment is something that I cannot accept.

I may have a suggestion on that. I don't want to cede the floor because we may need to be here a while if there isn't going to be any resolution possible here. Can I start with two things? Is it possible to ask a question of a couple of other members? I would just like to, if I could, through you Madam Chair, while holding the floor, allow some time to Ms. Normandin—

The Chair: It's the Simms protocol that we used to use. I think it is. I think I would allow it in this circumstance because we seem to be stuck and it might move us forward.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm doing it in a way that strives to get us through this. Again, I think it's ill-advised to be going down this path but I sense that I'm in the minority on that, so I want to arrive at a way that we can move on to some of the things we need to be doing and the things we should be talking about.

Can I start by asking Madame Normandin what her feelings are on the proposal that a majority vote of Parliament would be enough to invoke emergency measures? Can I get her sense on whether she agrees or disagrees with that, first of all?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The point of my remarks is exactly to discuss that.

For starters, we tend to slightly lose sight of the fact that we are discussing a set of procedural rules that will enable members to continue to do their work during a crisis.

I liked the parallel Mr. Alghabra established with emergency measures because I was going to do the same. This could be adopted by a majority government, and there is a political price to pay for doing it needlessly. In Quebec, oddly enough, we still remember this 50 years later.

Similarly, if we must operate unanimously, there is a political price to pay for creating obstacles to prevent a Parliament from being able to operate virtually during a crisis. Be it by a majority vote or unanimously, I am comfortable with the two proposals, as long as work is done to draft procedural rules for the future. In any case, that is what we will do indirectly for the time being.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Given that, I don't sense that there is enough opposition to defeat this necessarily. There may or may not be. There doesn't appear to be evidently that. I feel strongly enough about this, and I know there are others who feel this way as well. I just can't allow this to happen. I couldn't, in good conscience, go home and sleep tonight knowing that I may have given away our very democracy.

We'll be here a while, until the end of the meeting—I'll probably hold the floor—barring a successful conclusion to this. Let me maybe turn to Mr. Turnbull with a question.

First of all, could I just get him to read the last part, the second portion of his recommendation as he would have it be, both the initial version and his amended version? It's the part that goes "That the committee further recommends".

Can he read the original version of that and the amendment he's proposing? I ask him that because I may have a suggestion.

• (1625)

The Chair: That's what I was going to ask because—

Mr. Blake Richards: If he could read that first, then I would then make a suggestion to him. I'll see if I can get some agreement that he would be willing to consider it a friendly amendment. Then we can figure out where we're at.

The Chair: Absolutely. I think that could help.

I'm not going to allow the Simms protocol throughout the whole session because we are limited on time. However, if this can help and can maybe perhaps move us forward, then go ahead.

Mr. Turnbull, would you like to answer that?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Sure. I'm more than happy to.

I'll read the last sentence as it originally was proposed, and then I will read the friendly amendment. It said, "The committee further recommends these modified standing orders only come into force and be rescinded at the agreement of all recognized parties." Then

the friendly amendment replaces that last bit, so "at the agreement of all recognized parties" would be replaced with "by majority vote in the House of Commons."

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you for that. I just needed to get the wording so I could try to figure out a way that I might be able to suggest something as a way out of this.

I've made my concerns quite clear. I don't believe that a majority vote of Parliament should be enough to create these kinds of emergency provisions. I know there were some other concerns that I hadn't considered myself, but I think they are valid concerns. They're about the possibility that, once these are in place, a governing party, or anyone else who felt they had enough ability to utilize these for their own benefit, could choose to keep them in place by not giving their agreement.

That is the weird situation we're in. I think there may be a way out of it. I'm trying to figure out how to word it, but first I'll explain what I'm trying to do so that I can get a sense if there's agreement. If there is, maybe we can come up with some wording.

Essentially, what I would be looking to do is to make a suggestion that we return to the initial suggestion that the modified standing orders could only come into force at the agreement of all recognized parties. I think what we would then be looking to do is to try to make it so that if one of those parties were to withdraw their consent at any point, or their agreement, then they would be rescinded through that.

Therefore, when all parties are in agreement, the measures could be put in place, and they would stay in place only as long as all parties agree. That would remove the ability for a majority in the House of Commons, or one party in the House of Commons that happened to have a majority, to either put these in place or refuse to remove them.

First, I hope that's clear. If it's clear, can I get some sense from people? I don't know if we can do a straw poll or something to get a sense of whether there is some agreement on the principle. I think I could probably come up with some wording if there is. The idea would be simply that only through all parties agreeing could these be put in place, and they would remain in place until one or more of the parties removes its agreement.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, may I ask a question?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes. You know, I think we're making some progress—baby steps—so that might help.

Mr. Richards, would you be able to cede the floor so that Madam Normandin could ask you a question?

• (1630)

Mr. Blake Richards: I won't cede the floor, but I will allow her to use some of my time.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I think the most important consideration is to vote on drafting a set of procedural rules. I know that this proposal can be taken into consideration separately from that relative to the method of applying that set of rules.

I was very comfortable with Ms. Blaney's proposal, but I would not want to be prevented from debating the drafting of a set of procedural rules. I was wondering whether it would be possible to first vote on the equivalent of what is proposed in LIB 1 and BQ 10—in other words, preparing a set of procedural rules and then voting on Ms. Blaney's proposal. I propose that this be done by unanimous consent and that, if the proposal is rejected, we be able to vote on using majority consent instead.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Richards, would you be okay with that suggestion?

Mr. Blake Richards: Maybe we can just have her repeat that. I'm not sure I completely understood it.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Normandin, go ahead.

Ms. Christine Normandin: I suggest that the vote be held in three stages. That would be representative of our current debates. We could hold a first vote on creating parallel regulations for emergency measures, a second vote on the requirement for unanimous consent in order to trigger the implementation of those procedures and, if that proposal was rejected, a vote on the fact that majority consent would then be required.

Ms. Blaney's proposal on unanimity was actually the first one presented for discussion.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, I'll respond to that in three parts as well.

On the first part, I'm opposed to the idea of our looking at ways we would trigger these kinds of things in the future. At this point, I think what we've been directed to do by the House of Commons—and what we should do, as well, at this time—is to deal with what we're doing in the current circumstances. When things return to somewhat normal, we as a committee should then study what we would do in future circumstances. At that point—I would be completely in agreement with you—we should be doing exactly what you've suggested in the first part of your suggestion. I just don't think that now is the time for that.

Having said that, I also recognize that I appear to be in the minority on that. I'm not going to hold up or prevent that from being decided today, if we remove this aspect that I have the most concern about—and that's the second part of your query—this idea that somehow this could be triggered through a majority, or rescinded or not rescinded in that way. That's where I have a real problem, because I see that as a threat to democracy—a very dangerous threat to democracy. I would never allow.... As long as I felt there were enough votes for that to pass, I would never allow it to come to a vote. I'd do everything in my power to ensure that didn't happen, and I think there are other members who feel as strongly as I do

about that. We won't be getting anywhere if that's the path we're going down. I don't do that lightly. I only do it because I think this is such a threat to democracy that I couldn't live with myself if I didn't do everything I could possibly do to oppose it.

Then, to your third question, obviously we wouldn't even get to that point, because as long as I feel there's enough support to have a vote that would allow this to be done by a majority, I'll go to the wall on that one. That is how important it is that we protect our democracy from that kind of a threat.

I hope that clarifies where we're at. If we were to somehow divorce these two things, the first one may be able to come to a vote. However, as long as I feel there's any possibility that there's enough support for it to pass, there's no way I will allow the potential for our democracy to be removed from us in that way.

Does that clarify the questions?

I guess the floor is still mine, or—

• (1635)

The Chair: Yes, it is.

Can I just clarify one thing?

You stated at the end that your opposition overall is to looking at any future emergencies, but the sticking point seems to be what triggers it and what triggers it for us to come out of the virtual setting.

Correct me if I'm wrong. You said it should be agreement of all parties that triggers going into a virtual Parliament, but the opposition of even one party would undo the virtual Parliament and bring us back to the regular Standing Orders. Is that correct?

Mr. Blake Richards: Correct. That would be the intention. I could come up with the wording. The idea is to try to satisfy the concerns that some had, and I think they were legit concerns. They just weren't concerns that I had considered previously. There could be a very legitimate situation where all parties would agree—and I think this would have been a circumstance of that—to the idea of going into these emergency standing orders or whatever you would want to call them, which could potentially give, not knowing what they are, because we haven't even come up with what those are....

Again, just on a sidebar here, that speaks to why we shouldn't be considering the future now. We haven't even come up with what those are, and we certainly haven't done anywhere near enough study to come up with what those are. We haven't given ourselves the benefit of looking at the current context and what we've done, and what other countries and other legislatures have done. We would be making a huge mistake, I think, to go down that road, but my sense is that others want to do that. I think it's a mistake, a huge mistake, but it's a mistake that others appear to be prepared to go with.

The problem is that without even knowing what those are, we're suggesting that we would allow these things to be put in place through this amendment by a majority vote.

Even if we were to stick with the idea of its being unanimous—by all the recognized parties—to go into these situations, the circumstance that has been raised here by Mr. Brassard and maybe one other is the idea that, if this is to be rescinded by a unanimous vote, it could allow one party—and the most likely circumstance you could imagine is that it would be a governing party—to prevent the rescinding of these emergency measures. They would be doing that because, one would assume, they find that they're liking the idea of the extra power—or the lesser accountability—it gives them.

That is also a concern. It's just one that I hadn't had, so I was trying to find a way... Although it isn't perfect, and I think we should be taking more time to consider this, if we're being forced to go down this path, which appears to be where we're at, I'm just trying to find a way to make it so that our democracy is protected in the best way that it can be. The idea would be that all parties would have to agree to go in, and that as soon as one party felt it was no longer appropriate, we would come out of it. That prevents, on either end of it, a government either taking that kind of power for themselves without other parties agreeing that it's necessary or keeping that power for themselves although other parties don't feel it's necessary.

I don't think one has to think real hard to find circumstances where there are governments in power in countries that have gone from a democratic situation to something that's less than democratic, and where this would have been a real easy way for one of those individuals to take that kind of power. That's why I have that concern.

I hope that clarifies things. I guess what I'll do at this point is indicate that for me these concerns are grave enough that I don't intend to allow a vote until I get some indication that others have rethought the lack of concern they have here. If at any time, whether it be Mr. Turnbull, who feels the willingness to pull this amendment, or if others who have previously expressed support for it... I'm only assuming the support of the other government members, because I haven't heard anything from them to the contrary. Well, most of the other government members.... I guess Mr. Alghabra has sort of indicated his feelings, and he is supporting it.

At the end of the day, if one or two members, or others, feel that they can see clearly that we're not getting anywhere here, or they have a change of heart and realize the threat this causes to democracy—and I'll speak and make the points I need to make to try to convince others of this situation—just simply put your hand up, do a point of order and indicate that you feel that way, and I can stop talking to try to convince people.

• (1640)

Until then, I will try to do everything to convince them that there is no way we should be going down this dangerous road of allowing our democracy to be threatened in such a way.

The Chair: If I may just interject for 30 seconds, how about Madame Normandin's suggestion that we not talk about the contentious issue yet and perhaps move to the first recommendation as is, rather than getting into what does or does not trigger it?

Could we call for a vote on the first recommendation as it is in the draft report?

Mr. Blake Richards: I suppose that's a possibility. You know where my thoughts are on it. What you're suggesting, Madam Chair, is a vote on LIB 1, or what are we suggesting?

The Chair: Yes, we have LIB 1, then CPC 2, and then BQ 10.

This was brought about only because it seemed as though some suggestions were similar, so we were trying to combine them, but we don't have to, necessarily.

Mr. Blake Richards: This is something I might have raised as a point of order, but since we're having a back-and-forth exchange anyway, I'll just ask the question. How do we reconcile this? We deal with LIB 1, and maybe the clerk will have to give you some advice on this, Madam Chair, because there are such similarities between LIB 1, BQ 10, and NDP 2. I will also point out that NDP 2 also includes the way these would be put into force and rescinded, which I favour of the three. I don't like any of them, but I favour it of the three because of that. If there were to be a vote on LIB 1, what would then happen to BQ 10 and NDP 2? Would they no longer be voted on because they are similar? What would become the status of those?

That's important for members to know if we are to go to a vote on this, because maybe the Bloc, the NDP, Conservative members, or even some Liberal members might prefer one of those suggestions, and if we vote for LIB 1 and those are thrown out as a result, we could be going down a road that maybe people didn't intend to go down.

We need to get some clarity. Where we have these similar recommendations, what happens then when we vote on LIB 1? Does BQ 10 get thrown out? Does NDP 2 get thrown out? If that isn't the case and we then vote on BQ 10, does that take precedence over LIB 1 and it gets thrown out? We need some clarity as to what actually happens here with the votes.

The Chair: Absolutely. I think some of those technical decisions are made when we're looking at legislation, but let's have the clerk weigh in on this one, and you can still have the floor, Mr. Richards.

The Clerk: Mr. Richards, the chair is correct. Those tend to be the types of considerations that come into play. For example, during a clause-by-clause meeting when the committee is considering various amendments, occasionally when an amendment gets adopted, it has the effect or the impact of knocking out other ones.

There's a lot more latitude when it comes to a draft report. It's really up to the committee to determine what the recommendations are. Procedurally, if the committee wanted to adopt multiple similar types of recommendations for the report, it could do that. There might be issues of consistency or inconsistency because of that, but procedurally speaking, there wouldn't be anything stopping it. It wouldn't be, as the chair indicated, the same situation in which, if the committee were considering amendments in clause-by-clause to a bill, there would be an automatic impact if some amendments were adopted and others would need to be dropped.

Essentially, it would be in the committee's hands to determine if any other recommendations needed to be adopted, even if there were some, or quite a lot, of overlap in them.

• (1645)

The Chair: It wouldn't have that effect, and we could carry on into the others.

What I was saying the other day was that the purpose is to have a report that makes sense stylistically, so that we're not repeating ourselves over and over in the report, but essentially we could continue down and not make the amalgamation.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, I understand the clarification we just received. However, I will point out that although it's possible to have three recommendations that say something similar or the same, it's quite awkward, to say the least. I would suggest that members might want to consider that problem before voting.

I'm not sure how to even deal with that situation. If you wanted to do a straw poll and get a sense of which one of the three recommendations has the most support, and then maybe deal with it first, rather than going in order like that...because I don't really know where others are at in terms of whether they would prefer LIB 1, BQ 10, or NDP 2. Maybe we need to get a straw poll to give us some sense of that, and then proceed with the motion on it, if that's what we are going to do.

The Chair: Mr. Richards, can we get an idea as to which one you prefer out of LIB 1, BQ 10, and NDP 2? I think that might move us along.

Mr. Blake Richards: Certainly, from my perspective, NDP 2 is the preferable one. It's only preferable because... I disagree with the other idea, that we have a modified set of standing orders for future situations. I think that's something we should analyze later, in a second report. If we're going to go down this path, I want to ensure there are some rules around how those standing orders would be put into force and rescinded. In my mind, there still would need to be an amendment to the NDP one to make the change about how they would be rescinded, possibly. However, I think the principle that the NDP is trying to accomplish on that part of it is still...

I would be interested to hear Ms. Blaney's thoughts on the proposal I've made, in terms of whether she would agree with that idea. I hadn't even considered the possibility, and maybe she hadn't either, of a majority government deciding to hold those emergency powers by being the one party that doesn't agree to rescind.

I would love to hear Ms. Blaney's thoughts on that, if we could. She's saying "the agreement of all recognized parties" for it to come into force. Would she agree, then, that it would only remain in force as long as all recognized parties agreed? In other words, if one party decides to pull its agreement on it... I would assume that the only way a party could pull its agreement would be through some kind of a motion. The bottom line is, would she agree on that principle, that it would come into force and stay in force only as long as all parties agree?

I want to get her thoughts on that, if I can, Madam Chair, and then I might be able to make some decision on that.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney.

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): On a point of order, Madam Chair, we've been listening to Mr. Richards for some time now. I think we know where he stands.

He's interested in hearing where other members of this committee stand. I think, in fairness, if he wants answers to those questions, he is going to have to yield the floor and let them share their views, as we have been generous enough to do with his time.

Mr. Richards has been speaking for some time now, and we have a motion before us. He has presented—I've lost count—at least four suggestions on how it might be amended or improved in his opinion. He's now asking for other people's input. Procedurally, the only way he can do that correctly is if he yields the floor to let other people speak.

• (1650)

Mr. Blake Richards: I can respond to that point of order.

The Chair: It's a point of order for me, and so—

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, but other members have had an opportunity to respond to a point of order and give their input, so I would like to do that.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Blake Richards: I will point out to the member—and I think he must be a new member; I don't recognize him—that he's probably not aware that members have the right to speak in committee, and to speak at length if necessary. I am simply doing what I'm doing—and you're allowing that, Madam Chair—in the interest of trying to move forward with something.

My reasons for doing what I'm doing, asking the questions of other members, are to get some sense... I don't want to yield the floor, and there's a very obvious reason for why I don't want to do that. I don't want to see this principle that's been introduced through the amendment to the amendment come to a vote, because I'm quite concerned about the threat it causes to democracy.

I'm trying to get a sense of where we're at with other members without yielding the floor. I'm doing that out of the best interests of the committee. If Mr. Maloney does not want to allow that, then he should be prepared to listen to my voice for some time to come.

The Chair: I'm going to answer as to the procedural issue, since I've heard from both members.

What I was in essence trying to do was make some progress here. In the previous Parliament, and in our last report—not that we have to comply with it; it's not procedural, really—we had a way of operating in the past where we would allow for short and small answers or interjections if there was consensus by the committee to carry on that way. If I'm seeing now that the committee does not entertain it or does not allow me to use that flexibility, then I might not do that anymore.

I was doing it also, Mr. Richards, just as you were saying, in order to maybe find a compromise or a solution to this, because I do understand and I do recognize that you have the floor and that you could carry on if you like. But if things are not moving forward, then maybe the Simms protocol is no longer of value at this moment. That is up to the committee, really. Usually, it was just latitude that we had given in the past when all members seemed to be in agreement that it would help.

If the committee members don't feel that this is helping to move us forward, then it really is up to the committee, I guess, and it's up to you, Mr. Richards.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, can I make a point of order as well?

Mr. John Brassard: I'm going to make a suggestion.

Clearly, we're at a standoff here. I think Mr. Turnbull has heard the significant concerns on the recommendation that he put on the floor. I think there are others who may share those. I think we need a reset here, right now. In order for us to get to that point, I would ask if Mr. Turnbull would consider withdrawing his recommendation. Perhaps we need unanimous consent through you, Madam Chair, to do that. That is something that I think would allow us to get to a point where we could reset, because clearly there is a concern there.

The other thing I would suggest to the members of the committee, if Mr. Turnbull is amenable to removing his recommendation, is that perhaps we can look at and maybe put our minds to a situation that's similar to what we have now, whereby any agreement to adopt any emergency measures should be with all parties. It should include a time frame that's agreed upon and that can only be extended by further agreement. Maybe that is.... What we have now is a simple solution to this.

Madam Chair, I think Mr. Richards was really trying to go in that direction, with an understanding, given the concerns that Mr. Turnbull's amendment or recommendation has. If he's willing to withdraw that, I think we need to step back, reset and then look at where we need to go, and I think where we need to go is similar to what we have now.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

For clarification—and I did previously ask Mr. Richards this, too—if we were to see whether Mr. Turnbull would be willing to take back the recommendation or the amendment to the recommendation, how would we reset? Would we reset by starting with the first recommendation as it's seen in our report, or would we start by having a general conversation about where we need to go? That's something you said at the onset. Where would that reset take us? That's what I'm trying to ask.

Mr. John Brassard: Well, unfortunately, I think it would take us back to the first recommendation that we're dealing with. I say “unfortunately” because we're still on it. I'm not going to repeat it. We've expressed our concerns with the issue of “extraordinary circumstances” and “fully functioning”, but I think that if we incorporate something similar to what is in place right now, this may help us get beyond the point that we're in. As I said earlier, what we have in place right now is agreement from the parties, time limits and all of this stuff.

Again, I go back to my earlier point—and I hate to repeat it—but I still think this is forward thinking. This doesn't encapsulate what the context is for what our report is supposed to look like. We could

be looking at these things later on, Standing Orders, etc., but I think we need to step back. If Mr. Turnbull is willing to do that, then we go back to LIB 1 and try to find a solution to that, Madam Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Richards has the floor right now, so we'll continue with that, and when Mr. Richards is done, we can ask Mr. Turnbull if he would like to do that, after Mr. Richards has finished having the floor.

Mr. Blake Richards: I will gladly, if this Mr. Maloney will decide to remove his lack of consent for the Simms protocol, give Mr. Turnbull an opportunity to indicate—

An hon. member: I will not—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): On a point of order, Madam Chair, I take exception to the fact that Mr. Richards is referring to Mr. Maloney in such a way, as “this” Mr. Maloney, as though he's not an appropriate member of the committee. He's been a member of Parliament, despite the fact that Mr. Richards might not be aware of it, by beating a Conservative in 2015, and was re-elected in 2019, so he's certainly been around long enough not to be referred to as “this” member of Parliament.

I would appreciate a little more respect from members as they sit around this table.

The Chair: I think that's a valid point. I kind of missed you saying that, and it's not appropriate for any of us to refer to each other that way. Mr. Maloney has joined us to substitute for another member. I believe he also chairs a committee of the House of Commons as well, so we all have our own experiences. I think this committee is full of members with tons of good experience and backgrounds.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, just to be clear, I was simply trying to give Mr. Maloney an opportunity to rescind his previous lack of consent. If it was phrased in such a way—and there was no intention of that—that offended anyone's sensibilities, I do apologize for that. There was no intention to offend anybody. It was simply to point out the situation we're in.

Mr. James Maloney: This member was not offended, but I will not rescind.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Tochor.

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, my Internet was cutting in and out, and I couldn't hear or see. Maybe this has been determined already. Did Mr. Turnbull rescind his proposed amendment or not? I couldn't follow the debate. Did he indicate he would rescind it?

• (1700)

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Richards still has the floor.

You have your hand up to have the floor next, I believe, and after that will be Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Corey Tochor: No, no, I had a point of order. I couldn't hear Ryan's—

The Chair: Oh, okay, so all along your hand was up for a point of order. I was thinking you were next up after Mr. Richards.

Mr. Corey Tochor: No, I would like to be on the speaking order, but I did have a point of order that my Internet was cutting in and out and I didn't have audio. I had video, though. I just want to confirm where the debate is. Right now we can't move forward unless the proposed amendment is removed by Mr. Turnbull. Is that correct?

The Chair: Perhaps it's correct. We're not quite clear or sure we would still be able to move forward. That hasn't really been indicated completely. The desire to have it removed has been indicated, but whether any of these would be adopted really is beyond me. We have yet to see.

Mr. Richards has the floor, and then you have the floor, Mr. Tochor, and then Mr. Duncan. Then, if Mr. Turnbull would like to have the floor after that, he would have the floor. He hasn't raised his hand yet.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll just point out to Mr. Turnbull, for his information, that despite his colleague's lack of willingness to rescind his lack of consent for the Simms protocol, he's more than able to grab the floor with a point of order anytime and indicate that he's willing to rescind if he'd like to do that. In the meantime, I hope I don't bore everybody too much. This principle is that important.

It is really unfortunate, and I don't want to be in this position in any way, Madam Chair. I want to make that really clear. This is not my preference. This is not what I came here to do today. I'm shocked that we're in this position. I was shocked and frankly horrified by the suggestion that was made. It kind of came out of nowhere. I'm not sure if there was an intention all along on the part of the Liberals, the governing party, to do this, and this was just a way of doing it as a sneak attack, or whether this was something that was just conceived in Mr. Turnbull's mind as something that he thought might be a good idea, and he is maybe just too proud to admit that maybe it was a mistake, or maybe he feels this strongly that it's not a mistake.

I don't know where he is, and I guess unless he chooses to make a point of order or his colleague chooses to reconsider his ill-advised lack of consent for the Simms protocol, we won't know this, so we'll continue to speculate on what the motivations are here and what the reasons are. That's unfortunate, because I don't want to be speculating on those, and I don't want to be speaking for any length of time to this either. It's unfortunate that we're in this position.

As I said, I do disagree with the idea of going down the road that we're going down and making recommendations for future sittings. I'm just going to read the motion again to remind members, because, even though Mr. Brassard read a portion of it earlier, it seems as though there was still some confusion amongst members. I heard in some of the comments that were made by a few members that there still seems to be some confusion on what we're actually here to do.

I'll read from the motion that was passed by the House. It starts with "notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House", of course, and there's a series of clauses. I'll

read a few that are relevant to us. I won't read the whole thing at this point. Clause (l) states this:

(l) during the period the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order, the Standing Committee on Health, the Standing Committee on Finance, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology may hold meetings for the sole purpose of receiving evidence related to the COVID-19 pandemic, provided that, at such meetings, (i) committee members shall attend and witnesses shall participate via either videoconference or teleconference, (ii) committee members attending by videoconference or teleconference shall be counted for the purposes of quorum, (iii) proceedings shall be made available to the public via the House of Commons website, (iv) notices of membership substitutions pursuant to Standing Order 114(2) may be filed with the clerk of each committee by email, and further provided that these committees (v) shall each meet at least once per week, unless the whips of all recognized parties agree not to hold a meeting, (vi) may each receive evidence which may otherwise exceed the committee's mandate under Standing Order 108, (vii) shall meet within 48 hours of the receipt by email, by the clerk of the committee, of a request signed by any four members of the committee;

Then it goes on, in clause (m), to talk about our committee. This next part is very important. It's on what we're here to study: "the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to study ways in which members can fulfill their parliamentary duties while the House stands adjourned on account of public health concerns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic".

• (1705)

I'll stop there and just give some parenthetical statements. What you didn't notice in that was anything about direction regarding what we would do in future circumstances that might arise and be similar to this or other emergency-type situations. That's important for the purposes of what we're discussing right now, because what we're talking about in these three motions....

I'm just going to read them quickly as well, before I get back to reading from the Standing Orders.

Recommendation LIB 1 is "We should establish an alternative set of Standing Orders to be used in extraordinary circumstances to enable a fully functioning virtual Parliament."

That is not talking about the current circumstance, that we need to have revised standing orders, an alternative set of standing orders. It's talking about "extraordinary circumstances", which could mean the current circumstances, one would assume, I guess. Again, I'm not completely clear on that. There hasn't been a lot of indication by government members on exactly the rationale behind this, and that's unfortunate, but one would have to assume that it would also pertain to future circumstances. That's where I have an issue with it, because I really think this is a mistake.

When you're in the middle of a crisis.... I've been through this and maybe I'll come back to it in a minute, but I'll just touch on it briefly. In my riding, in 2013, we faced very significant floods. I'm sure some members will remember them. They were in southern Alberta, and they originated in my riding. They affected a number of constituencies, but mine was certainly one of the affected areas. I know that many of those communities, after the fact, of course reviewed their procedures and their protocols around how they dealt with the situation. They looked at ways they could shore up their communities, with better armour along the banks, for example, things they could do to be better prepared if this situation were to arise in the future.

But what they didn't do during the crisis, while they were trying to deal with the crisis and everything that went with that.... They set up emergency operations centres, and in those operations centres—

The Chair: Mr. Richards, I'm just asking for your permission. I was just clarifying something with the clerk to try to get a better understanding of the procedure here, and I have been told that if I were to interject and ask Mr. Turnbull a question, it would be possible. The Simms protocol means you having a conversation with Mr. Turnbull, but if I were to ask for a point of clarification from Mr. Turnbull, you would still have the floor. It wouldn't be using the Simms protocol. We wouldn't really be going into that without everybody agreeing to that friendly protocol, but it would provide some clarification for me, I think, as to where we're headed, since it's 5:09 now on the clock.

Mr. Turnbull, would you be able to provide me with some clarification on the amendment you proposed? It was proposed with a friendly amendment attached to it. What are your thoughts and what are you thinking on that?

• (1710)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I've heard the many concerns that have been raised. I still think the amendment was intentionally proposed to address some of the comments that were made by my colleagues, in particular Mr. Brassard. I can see that maybe it didn't have the intended effect.

I think the recommendation is a solid recommendation. It comes from an amalgamation of three parties' recommendations that are very, very similar, but I'd be open to suggestions if anybody has a suggestion on how we might move forward.

The Chair: My question would be about the friendly amendment. I believe Mr. Alghabra mentioned adding language about a "majority vote". Are you still considering putting that version of the recommendation forward, that ends with "a majority vote", or the one that ends with the NDP 2 ending, which calls for the agreement of all parties?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm still unconvinced as to which version is better. I see the intentions of my colleagues, but I'd like to understand whether we could get some agreement on this and move forward, even if we were to go with the original version.

The Chair: Thank you. That clarifies things.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Before I get back to the comments I was making—and you may want to go further with this—I may be able to help with a suggestion.

First of all, I want to make it really clear that although, as I've outlined, I am opposed to the idea of looking at future situations, I'm not trying to hold up a report from the committee. I recognize that I'm in a minority in that viewpoint. I believe in democracy, and I can clearly see I'm in a minority in this situation. I might disagree, and I would certainly vote against anything, but I want to make it clear to Mr. Turnbull and others that I'm not trying to hold anything up and filibuster or anything of that nature.

Where I have a concern is on the second amendment he made, which was the idea of having a majority vote. That's where I feel there is a real threat to democracy. A couple of other members, from two parties at least, have expressed similar concerns. I'm not sure their concerns are as grave as mine, but they've certainly had concerns. Clearly, there are members here today, representing parties that hold somewhere in the neighbourhood of almost half the seats in the House of Commons, who have these concerns, so I think it's something that should be taken seriously.

I will say two things.

First, if you want to return to Mr. Turnbull, Madam Chair—

The Chair: Yes, I do.

Mr. Blake Richards: —what I've said might give him better clarity as to my concerns and may give him some comfort in what he would suggest we do.

Second, I suggest to you, Madam Chair, that you might want to use the powers that you have. I had said to Ms. Blaney that maybe it would be good to hear her perspective on my suggested amendment to NDP 2, for example, which would enable what she was suggesting, and then have one of the parties able to pull their.... Canvass her on that one, because I think there are two things we have to figure out here. First, we have to figure out—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I have a point of order, if that would be appropriate at this moment.

The Chair: Absolutely. I was going to move on to you, Ms. Blaney.

What I will say, as Mr. Turnbull has said, is that the original amendment may not be completely accurate, but it is a fair combination of three different recommendations.

Would you be willing, Ms. Blaney, to consider the first version of the recommendation that was amalgamated?

• (1715)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: First of all, let me thank Mr. Richards for talking earlier about what a kind, gentle person I am. I appreciate that, and I want to let him know that I certainly know when it's time to fight. I thank him for recognizing that friendly British Columbia spirit.

The first recommendation that Mr. Turnbull put forward, which combined the three motions and included the part that of course I stand by very steadfastly, about making sure that all the parties have power in this, is important to me. I want to clarify that I do not want to see those sections of the motion separated. I don't think they belong.... I can't vote for the first one without the part added to it, which says that all recognized parties will have the power to work.

I think it's important to reiterate that this is what we have seen. It has not always been perfect, but what we've seen is that over this period of time, all recognized parties have found ways to work together. I would like to see that continue. I think it is absolutely essential for democracy.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Turnbull, it looks like Mr. Richards and Ms. Blaney are saying that the original amendment you proposed is least offensive, at least in one case.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, on the point of order, could I comment quickly before Mr. Turnbull, if that's okay?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: The only reason I want to do this is that I'm still not clear on where Ms. Blaney is in terms of the rescinding. I feel like we might be close to having something the committee could pass, even though I wouldn't support it. Ms. Blaney has made it quite clear that she wouldn't support anything that doesn't have some indication of how they would come into force and how they would be rescinded. There might be some agreement there, if Mr. Turnbull chooses to go back to his original, but I still suggest that my concern about—

The Chair: Let's ask Ms. Blaney—

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm sorry, but can I first just make sure that it's clear what I'm asking?

The Chair: It is.

Mr. Blake Richards: What I would be asking her is, how does she feel about the principle of rescinding it? Does she feel that a majority vote would be okay to rescind it? Does she feel that it needs all parties to rescind it?

That would obviously bring into question the concern Mr. Brassard raised about one party holding on, a governing party deciding to hold on to those powers, even though all the other parties feel that those powers need to be rescinded at that point. How does she feel about the amendment saying that in that circumstance one party withdrawing its agreement would then be the requirement, rather than a majority vote or all parties on the rescinding side?

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, do you agree to the modification to your original ending? Your original ending was consistent with how to invoke and how to rescind.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I thank the member for that question, and I actually can answer it. My concern would be.... I think the pressure is pretty strong from Canadians about that level of collaboration, but I do understand the concern of one party holding the power. We've actually seen some demonstration of that in the last few

months as well, where if a party doesn't agree, it means everything returns and it means calling in all parliamentarians.

I think that's something I would be willing to debate. I don't quite feel that there's the thoughtfulness required for me to amend it at this point.

The Chair: Okay. I think at this point we could go back to the original proposal of the amalgamated three of Ms. Blaney's suggestion originally, Ms. Normandin's recommendation, and then Mr. Turnbull's recommendation, all combined together.

Could we go to a vote on that recommendation as being the first recommendation of this report?

Mr. Blake Richards: No, Madam Chair.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'll just clarify, if I may, Madam Chair, that—

The Chair: Yes, I guess that was a question for you, as to whether you would be willing to go to a vote on that, with the original without the friendly amendment.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I thought so, and yes, I would be amenable to that. I think it would be fine to go back to the original.

I can read it out again, if necessary, but I think you have it. The ending is “rescinded at the agreement of all recognized parties”. It includes—

• (1720)

Mr. Corey Tochor: Point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Tochor.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Is there a way that we could get an emailed copy of this? I'm not having the best audio and video today. Could we take a break and have someone from the clerk's office, maybe, email us the actual motion and amended motions? I can't follow along with all the amendments that have been made.

The Chair: I don't know.

Justin, could you...?

The Clerk: Hello, Mr. Tochor.

One of the issues that we would have for me as the clerk to distribute it is, of course, that one of our routine motions for the committee requires that I can only distribute material to the committee if it is in both official languages. It creates an impediment for me to be able to distribute it in an official capacity.

I imagine that the wording of the recommendation that Mr. Turnbull has is not in French, so that would obviously have to be translated for that purpose.

The Chair: We could have it read in again. From what I'm gathering from everybody, I think that nobody wants to hold this committee up anymore or hold this report up, and I think we're now back to the original, without the major—

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm not certain that's correct.

The Chair: I thought that's what I had gathered from you.

Mr. Blake Richards: I still have the floor, and I'm not yet clear—and obviously Mr. Tochor is unclear, because he's not able to hear things and it can't be sent to him. This is a real problem.

First of all, before we get to that part of it, I'm still not clear on what we're talking about returning to.

The Chair: We'll have it read out several times. I think that's the best we can do, since we do have the simultaneous interpretation. We can have it read very slowly. We can have it read a few times, until everyone has heard the recommendation. I would suggest that we try to write it down as much as possible.

A lot of the wording is on page 26, from the three different recommendations. It really is, from listening to it, kind of a cut-and-paste of a whole bunch of the parts of the three recommendations, but if you could follow along and write them down, that will maybe help us through that issue.

I appreciate everyone wanting to move this forward.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'll read it very slowly: “That the House establish an alternative set of Standing Orders, which enables....”

Do you want me to start again, Mr. Brassard?

Okay, I'll go back: “That the House establish an alternative set of Standing Orders, which enables the implementation of a virtual Parliament, so that the House can continue with its business in the event of a crisis or exceptional circumstance”—

Mr. Corey Tochor: Could you go back to right after “continue”?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, it says, “continue with its business in the event of a crisis or exceptional circumstance, such as those arising from the current pandemic.” The second sentence is “The committee further recommends these modified Standing Orders only come into force and be rescinded at the agreement of all recognized parties.”

I hope everyone got that. If I need to read it again, I'm happy to do that.

• (1725)

Mr. John Brassard: In the second part of that, “The committee further recommends” is the only part I got, Ryan.

Could you start after “recommends”?

The Chair: Can you read the last sentence?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Sure. It says, “The committee further recommends these modified Standing Orders only come into force and be rescinded at the agreement of all recognized parties.”

The Chair: Okay.

As I think we've debated this recommendation for two and half hours now, I'd like to see if we can call a vote on this recommendation.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, I have the floor, and I don't agree to that.

The Chair: I thought you said you would agree to move things forward.

Mr. Blake Richards: I still have a problem, and I'll explain why.

The Chair: But you could vote against it.

Mr. Blake Richards: No, that's not good enough, Madam Chair. The reason it's not good enough, and I'll explain it if you allow me, is that we're still in a situation where, although it solves the problem of putting in place these emergency standing orders where all parties must agree, it doesn't solve the problem that Mr. Brassard raised, where one party can continue to hold those powers because they refuse to agree.

The problem we have there is that we basically come around to a situation where the very thing we're trying to prevent is done another way through a back door. In other words, if we have a legitimate crisis and all parties agree, then we'll put in place these emergency standing orders. But then, when the crisis is averted, or most people believe it's averted, the one party—that would likely happen to be the governing party, obviously, one would assume—chooses not to allow it to be rescinded.

That's what this allows. One party could prevent it from being rescinded. It essentially allows the government to do by the back door what we're trying to prevent them from doing by the front door.

The Chair: Could I propose something? Perhaps we leave—

Mr. Blake Richards: That's why I'm suggesting we allow that amendment to the way it could be rescinded, so that a party can't do by the back door what we don't want it to do by the front door. If we can come up with an amendment there, then I'd be comfortable. Until then, I think our democracy is still at risk here.

The Chair: Could the language of how it's rescinded be completely taken out?

At this point, the parties have come to an agreement on how to move in this type of situation already. Perhaps they themselves can decide at that point as well how to do so. We would leave it at how to enter into the agreement: “The committee further recommends these modified Standing Orders only come into force at the agreement of all recognized parties.”

We're not prescribing anything; we're making no recommendations here on that. The parties could be left with that.

Mr. Blake Richards: The problem is that by not prescribing anything, since we're going down the road of prescribing this.... Again, I really believe we're making a big mistake by trying to figure out how to deal with future situations while we're in the middle of a crisis. That's where the whole problem with this starts.

Having said that, I recognize where we're at. I recognize that other parties, I think very ill-advisedly, are choosing to go down that path. I get that your suggestion is well-meaning, Madam Chair. The problem is that when you start to prescribe this and you prescribe the way you go into it, if you don't prescribe the way you come out, what you're essentially doing is exactly what we're trying to avoid. We're making it so that if the government doesn't want to come out of it, it can remain in those emergency powers indefinitely. That is the problem here.

We still have a problem. Unless I hear some indication that we can amend it so we don't have that problem, where the back door is going to be the way this is done rather than the front door, we're going nowhere. Not seeing any movement or effort on anyone's part to alleviate my concerns, or obviously the concerns that were originally raised by Mr. Brassard, I guess we're back to where we were.

Here we go. I'll go back to where I was prior to all of this.

Again, I want to make it really clear: I didn't come here today hoping that this would be the outcome. I came here today believing we could do a report. I felt, in looking at some of the recommendations, that there were probably going to be some things in the report that I wouldn't agree with. I mean, I'm in opposition. I've been in opposition for the last almost five years now, so I recognize how these things work, and I'm okay with that. It's obviously not my preference, but it is what it is.

I came here thinking it's a really nice day where I am. I thought maybe we would be done even a little early and I would enjoy a bit of the sunshine. I want to make it really clear that this is not an attempt to try to prevent a report—

• (1730)

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Again, for the sake of being constructive—because we genuinely want to come up with a report we can recommend to the House of Commons on what to do—can I make a suggestion? It would be that the House adopt these measures with a sunset time and that the measures will expire based on an agreed-upon date, and that only if all parties agree to extend them will they be extended; otherwise, they will just sunset on their own.

The Chair: That's a suggestion for us to entertain.

Mr. Richards, it creates a new formula for rescinding, having to readopt rather than having to rescind.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes. I mean, I don't know how others feel about this, but give me a minute to think it through. On the surface, I think what Mr. Alghabra has come up with could be a solution here.

As I said, just give me a minute to think it through completely and make sure there isn't something I haven't thought of. I will admit that initially I hadn't thought of this concern that Mr. Brassard raised. Then, when he raised it, it rang some alarm bells for me.

If you wouldn't mind, give me a minute to think about it. On the surface, I think it does solve the problem. What I'm trying to prevent, obviously, is a situation where the government can hold on to those emergency powers. I think having a sunset clause, which I

guess would have to be agreed to by all parties in advance—that would be part of the motion they would arrive at in having the emergency powers granted, and it would only be renewed if all parties agreed—that, I think, should get us where we need to be.

The Chair: Yes, I think so, too, although I'm not going to vote on it. I'm just following the debate. I hear your concerns, and I feel that this may alleviate some of those concerns so that one person can't hold on.

Mr. Blake Richards: I would be interested to hear the thoughts of others, especially Mr. Brassard, who originally raised the concerns, but I think it might get us there. I'm still opposed to the idea of submitting something that's about future situations, but that's irrelevant to this part of it.

The Chair: Madam Normandin has a point to make on that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I just want to make sure that I have understood correctly. The amendment proposal would be roughly the equivalent of our current approach, where the parties agree to begin the process and also agree on the period of time. Is that correct?

That is done every time the period of time is up and the parties come to a new agreement. They decide on a new time period and, once there is no longer agreement, that is over. That is exactly what we have now. That is the gist of your proposal, right?

[*English*]

The Chair: That is absolutely correct.

• (1735)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I just want to let the committee know that I would agree to that. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Blaney. I think we're getting somewhere, but I don't want to get prematurely excited about the fix.

Mr. Blake Richards: I think there's reason to be excited, Madam Chair. I would love to see some proposed wording to that, but I think, barring anything that—

Mr. John Brassard: I have some as well, Blake, that I could propose.

Mr. Blake Richards: Sure—

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Brassard. This will make the recommendation an all-party recommendation. You may not vote in favour of it, but at least it has contributions from all parties.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think what Madam Normandin spoke about is exactly what I brought up earlier. The mechanism already exists, so if we can reflect that accurately.... I think we can do it with this. I'm reading off my sheet here. This states that the words "come into force or be rescinded on the agreement of all recognized parties" be replaced with "come into force on the agreement of all recognized parties and only remain in force during for such time as the parties agree".

I can repeat it again if you like.

The Chair: I think there might be a simpler way of stating it. The first part was really good, but maybe someone has....

Repeat it.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Could you repeat it, please?

Mr. John Brassard: Yes. It's that the words "come into force or be rescinded on the agreement of all recognized parties" be replaced with "come into force on the agreement of all recognized parties and only remain in force during for such time as the parties agree".

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, I don't know whether this has to do with interpretation issues, but what I am hearing does not reflect the current reality as I have understood it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, I think it's a small nuance.

Mr. Alghabra, since you're the one who proposed this, you may have some wording.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I would propose that where it says "come into force" we add "for a predefined or pre-agreed-upon period of time and can only be extended by agreement of all parties".

Mr. Corey Tochor: Just for clarification, what date would you propose?

The Chair: I think the parties would be deciding that. They'd have to come up with their own agreement, given the circumstances each time. We wouldn't even be saying "this is the date". When they come to an agreement, they have to agree on an end date, and they all have to agree on that end date. Then, when that date comes, they could only go past it if all parties were to agree again. Otherwise, it would basically lapse out and you would revert to the original Standing Orders.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I would just say that I think the simplest way to say it might be "into force for a limited time and can only be extended at the agreement of all recognized parties". We just keep it simple.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm not in favour of that, but I do like the suggestion that Mr. Alghabra made. I think there are two very different things. Mr. Alghabra's suggestion makes it clear that it would be a pre-agreed period of time that the parties would have agreed to, and that it could only be extended if all parties then agreed. I still won't be comfortable voting for this, but not because that hasn't solved my concerns around the protection of democracy.

I think between the two of us and a few others who have contributed here, Mr. Alghabra, we can take credit for saving democracy here today. We'll go that far. Why not? Heck, we're politicians after all, right?

Now, it doesn't meet with my ability to vote for it, because [*Inaudible—Editor*] with future crises, during the middle of a crisis, is a bad idea. Having said that, it does meet with enough of my approval that we've saved democracy, or we've been able to preserve democracy, to the degree that I can yield the floor.

• (1740)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards. I really appreciate that.

I appreciate everybody's help in getting to this point. I think everyone has a clear understanding. We are going with basically everything Mr. Turnbull read out to us several times, up until that very last sentence, and then Mr. Alghabra's proposal for that last sentence.

Is everyone—

Mr. John Brassard: Sorry, Madam Chair, but is it possible for us to hear that one more time?

The Chair: Yes.

I think the first part was read several times, so go down to the last sentence about what the committee further recommends, and then Mr. Alghabra can reread what he's putting in place from that period onward.

Mr. John Brassard: It would be better to have Mr. Vaive or Andre do it, would it not?

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I'd be okay with that.

The Chair: Sure. That would be good.

Andre, you can help us out here.

Mr. Andre Barnes (Committee Researcher): I hope I have this written down correctly: "That the House establish an alternative set of standing orders which enables the implementation of a virtual Parliament so that the House can continue with its business in the event of a crisis or exceptional circumstance such as those arising from the current pandemic." After "The committee further recommends", I'm missing a chunk, and then it continues with "for a pre-determined, agreed upon, period of time and can only be extended if all parties agree."

Sorry. I'm missing a chunk.

The Chair: No problem. We'll have Omar take us from the period forward, and then maybe the analysts can write it down.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I can do that.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Yes, go ahead, Ryan.

I don't have it written down, to be honest.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It starts with, "The committee further recommends these modified standing orders only come into force", and then maybe Andre can take us from there.

Mr. Andre Barnes: To continue from what Mr. Turnbull was saying, “for a predetermined, agreed upon, period of time and can only be extended if all parties agree.”

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, I think there's one piece missing there. It's the part about the agreement of all recognized parties. I suggest that we add that back in, i.e., that the committee further agrees that these modified standing orders only come into force “at the agreement of all recognized parties” for a predetermined period of time and so on.

The Chair: Okay. Basically it's the whole original recommendation, and then after “parties” you would add a comma, and then put “for” and all of that language.

Got that, Andre? Yes.

Justin, can you help us call a vote on this recommendation? I think this one deserves a recorded vote, correct?

Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Sorry, Madam Chair, I didn't put my hand up but I still have a strong issue with the virtual Parliament part of this. There are several versions of a virtual Parliament, as I said earlier. We have the current version, in which we have committee structures, with members of Parliament on a Tuesday and a Thursday virtually, and then the House sitting. In the absence of any mention of a type of virtual Parliament, which we've heard through testimony could include a hybrid Parliament, I have a problem supporting this.

If we say “virtual Parliament”, then I believe it's open to interpretation and I don't think we should leave it like that, quite frankly. I would respectfully, Madam Chair, have to vote against this for that reason. I'm sorry.

• (1745)

The Chair: I understand, and you mentioned that at the beginning as well.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: On a point of order, Madam Chair, it's unfortunate that we're now 15 minutes from the end of the meeting and we haven't got anywhere near through. I know that's my fault, but that principle was so important to me that I felt the necessity to do that. It's unfortunate it took so long to arrive at a resolution, but now I'm concerned about what that means for the remainder of the recommendations and for finishing the report.

We've been told this is a hard deadline. We absolutely have to be done today, etc., etc. The only reason I raise that now prior to this vote is that there is a possibility that if we arrive at six o'clock eastern time, in 15 minutes or less, this could be the only recommendation that passes prior to that time. Therefore, could we have a report that would have only this one recommendation in it?

I raise that simply because I would be troubled by that possibility, so I'm trying to get a sense as to what our plan is. What are we going to do in the next 15 minutes that allows us to have a complete report rather than—

The Chair: We will not submit an incomplete report. I just want to assure you of that. We won't submit just this one recommendation. You have my word on that.

Mr. Blake Richards: How does that take place? That's what I'm asking.

The Chair: I'd really like to move towards this vote, but I want to assure you at this time that I will not have this report submitted with just one recommendation. I understand where your concern would come from on that. I completely agree that one recommendation cannot summarize all.... And we haven't even got to the CPC recommendations, right? I would not do that to you.

If we can, we will address that. But I've allowed everyone to speak for a really long period of time, so I just request that at this moment we carry on with this one vote for now, just the one. We have many more.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, I take you at your word, and I trust that, but I'm also curious. Is it just we don't quite have a plan yet? What's the reluctance to tell us? If you're going to fill us in, why not just do it now?

The Chair: We have a semi-plan. We don't have a complete plan, and I'm going to discuss that with all of you, because I did not anticipate either, just as you didn't anticipate, to come in today and be on this one recommendation. So I'd like to get this one recommendation, and then we can figure out a plan after that as to what we'll do. But I assure you I won't submit just the one recommendation and call it a complete report.

On recommendation one, could we have a vote on this please, Justin.

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

The Chair: Thank you.

My desire would be to move forward for as long as we can, but I have to find out from the clerk how much time we have so we can continue going through the report, so just a one-minute recess, please.

• (1750)

Okay, we have leeway but we're not sure for how long. I think we should keep moving forward and see how much progress we can make until we're told.... I can tell you we don't have all night. We do need a support team to do this, and the clerk will let me know as soon as he knows how much longer we can go.

At this time, I'd like to move on to CPC 2.

Do we have agreement to adopt CPC 2?

It doesn't seem that there's agreement on it at this point. Mr. Richards, Mr. Brassard, Mr. Duncan and Mr. Tochor, would you like a recorded vote on CPC 2?

An hon. member: Yes, please.

The Chair: Justin, could we have a recorded vote on CPC 2, please.

(Text of recommendation negated: nays 6; yeas 5 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Andre, may I have you remove BQ 10 and NDP 2 from the report since that has been addressed, and I'll remind you that none of them will be identified by party at the end. It's a collaborative effort.

We are moving on to NDP 1.

Is everyone willing to adopt NDP 1? There seems to be general consensus on this one.

Mr. Blake Richards: Hold on, Madam Chair. We've been talking about the other one for so long that I need a second to review this one. Sorry.

The Chair: Yes. I'm sorry. I've been reviewing them all night, over and over again to prepare for today so I have them....

Mr. Blake Richards: We talked so long about the other one that everything's blurry now. Please just give me 10 seconds.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Blake Richards: Just to be consistent.... In fact, I may not have support on it, but who knows? Hope springs eternal. I would make an amendment to take out the words "or any future". It would simply read "that may need modifying during the current event". I don't think I need to belabour why I feel that way, because I've expounded on that at length. I make that suggestion for an amendment.

The Chair: Okay. Ms. Blaney, would you consider that amendment?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm okay with that amendment.

• (1755)

The Chair: Okay.

Andre, can you remove the words "or any"....?

Mr. Blake Richards: It's "or any future". Those would be the three words.

The Chair: Yes. The words "or any future" are removed.

Can we adopt NDP 2 as amended?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, isn't it NDP 1?

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes.

The Chair: That's correct. It would be NDP 1. All of that will be removed anyway in the end. You're not going to see any of that, but for our record-keeping it does become NDP 1 at this point.

Mr. Blake Richards: Pardon me, Madam Chair, I thought we were discussing NDP 1.

The Chair: I'm looking for consensus on whether we can adopt NDP 2, which has now become NDP 1 as amended by you.

Mr. Blake Richards: I think we've missed—

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Can someone read it for us so we know which one we're—

The Chair: I'm sorry. It's NDP 1. I made the major mistake there, and I've moved too far past my sheet.

NDP 1 has only been amended. I'm so sorry that I'm the one messing you guys up right now. The words "or any future" have been removed from NDP 1. Is there agreement to adopt NDP 1 as amended?

Mr. Corey Tochor: I don't know what I'm voting on. Could I hear it again? I'm sorry.

The Chair: Yes. It would read: "That the Clerk of the House of Commons create and present a list to the committee of all standing orders that may need modifying during the current event rendering the House of Commons unable to meet in its entirety in-person."

It is on page 26 of the draft report and is labelled NDP 1.

Seeing as there is no disagreement, I believe NDP 1 has been adopted.

We are going to move past page 26 at this point.

We are moving on to LIB 2 on page 28. This recommendation states, "Undertake necessary steps to expand the House's capacity and operations to achieve a fully virtual Parliament, with the possibility of employing a hybrid model in the interim."

The Chair: Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Can I ask somebody from the Liberal side about this? I tried to broach this with Mr. Turnbull earlier. It's about the definition of "a fully virtual Parliament" in this context. What is the intent of this recommendation and how is it different from the LIB 1 recommendation which, by the way, I'll remind you, I voted against because it doesn't employ the hybrid model. What is the intent of this recommendation, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Could someone speak to that?

Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: They might look similar, but they're not, because the first recommendation deals with standing orders. This recommendation asks the House of Commons to prepare its capacity and its operations to be able to accommodate a fully virtual Parliament.

To answer Mr. Brassard's question about what "a fully virtual Parliament" means, it means that it's able to do all of its duties virtually. We recognize, as I think is implicit in this recommendation, that currently the House of Commons operations are not ready, and therefore an interim or hybrid model can be continually deployed or used right now, but to prepare the House of Commons capacity.... Maybe we will never use it, but it's to prepare the capacity so that we don't end up being, because of logistics, unable to do our job if one day we come to that point.

Mr. John Brassard: I'm not clear on this, Madam Chair. When Mr. Alghabra talks about a fully virtual Parliament, is that in an emergency crisis situation or is the intent here to look forward to a fully virtual Parliament as a potential replacement of the Westminster parliamentary system that we currently utilize?

• (1800)

The Chair: It is my understanding that we're studying this.

Mr. Alghabra, maybe it needs clarification and additions.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: It is clearly meant for extraordinary circumstances. If we need to refer to recommendation one, we can do that, but it's for extraordinary circumstances that the House would adopt it.

Mr. John Brassard: Okay.

Madam Chair, I hope you'll agree with me that it's not clear. One could easily interpret this as a movement towards a fully virtual Parliament over and above any extraordinary circumstances that might exist.

The Chair: Yes, I can see that. Maybe some wording can be proposed to incorporate recommendation one.

Mr. John Brassard: We are at six o'clock. I just want to be mindful of that, Madam Chair.

The Chair: It could probably be something quite simple. We could say, "in the circumstances as outlined in recommendation one" or something. I don't know.

Mr. Alghabra, do you have any comments on that? This is your recommendation and we would only amend anything if you were okay with it.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I welcome the suggestion. I have no problem with it. I'm thinking on the fly here. I'm thinking perhaps, "undertake necessary steps to expand the House's capacity and operations to achieve a fully virtual Parliament when agreed upon" or "as per recommendation one". I don't know if it's satisfactory to refer to recommendation one or "only under exceptional circumstances as referred to in recommendation one."

The Chair: I think some members have suggestions.

Mr. Duncan and then Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Madam Chair, I just—

The Chair: Could you unraise your hands, Mr. Richards and Mr. Duncan?

Mr. Richards, I think that hand has been raised for over an hour or so now. I just want that removed.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, my hand wasn't raised.

The Chair: It's never gone down, though. That's why I thought it was from before.

Mr. Blake Richards: It was down. I raised it recently.

The Chair: Oh.

Mr. Eric Duncan: He's just so eager, continually eager.

I have to smile a little, Madam Chair, when I read LIB 2, which is about expanding the House's capacity and operations to achieve a fully virtual Parliament. We just voted down a recommendation about standing committees being set up and authorized to exercise all their ordinary powers and now we're talking about doing that. I'll set that aside.

We're three hours in and I don't know what the next steps are—I'm sure we'll talk about that shortly—but I have a concern with the

way this reads. I think we need to have a fundamental conversation, debate or discussion in some detail about whether this is the chicken or the egg. I believe this needs to be the other way around.

We have a virtual setting right now that gives us some sense of the short term. I believe the long-term solution that is fair and encompasses all members' asks is between having a virtual option for those who can't be or don't want to be physically present and an option for those who can be. As health advice changes and when our House administration can physically accommodate more members in West Block and, by province or across the country, can allow more members, one of the things we could do is have a hybrid set-up. Over the course of time, while following health advice, of course, as we've done with everything, we could continue to build up numbers and then phase out the virtual parliamentary aspects where we may not need them.

When I look at this suggestion of employing a hybrid model in the interim, it seems as if that would go away. We can have a hybrid model. We need to have a conversation about the long-term plan. It may be months or a year before we can get back to having larger crowds or all of us together. I envy that day, whenever this may be done safely.

I fundamentally have a concern, and I think we need to have a conversation about what the best plan for Parliament is in the long run. I don't believe in starting with some sort of hybrid and then going fully virtual. I think it needs to be the other way around. We should start to build a hybrid system and make sure the technology is there to go outwards and do other types of things.

I'll leave this as a beginning comment and ask that we have some sort of conversation, because many aspects hang on this and we could have some compromise if we have a discussion among each other.

Thank you.

• (1805)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ginette, then Mr. Richards and then Ms. Blaney.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I was just going to suggest some language to simplify LIB 2. Keep it as is and at the end after "interim", put down "in the event of extraordinary circumstances", and leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you for that addition.

Mr. Richards, go ahead.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm going to make a different suggestion.

I'll point out first that I share the thoughts of Mr. Duncan. I found it quite contradictory to be proposing that we move to a fully virtual Parliament, yet tell committees that they shouldn't have any powers virtually. It's quite, we'll call it ironic, I suppose, rather than a word I could probably use.

I would like to make a different suggestion on this one that reflects some of the concerns that we've heard about the idea of maybe going towards a hybrid Parliament as a step during the current....

I'll make this suggestion. You've all heard my voice enough today, so I won't spend a bunch of time making the case for it other than to say that I think it will be obvious.

I would suggest we change it so that everything after "achieve a", I would say, "Undertake necessary steps to expand the House's capacity and operations to achieve a hybrid Parliament for the remainder of the spring sitting." That would be the full text of it if it's amended as such.

The Chair: Thank you for that suggestion.

We're going to hear from Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Blake Richards: I will, although I said I wouldn't belabour it with much debate, point out the reason for that. Obviously, as I've said many times today, our orders here from the House are to deal with the current crisis. This attempts to do just that, and that's why I would suggest that. I think it's realistic, whereas the other proposal wouldn't be realistic in the current circumstances, which is what we're supposed to be dealing with.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, give us your comments, and then we can see if Mr. Alghabra or the Liberals—I'm not sure whose recommendation this is—are willing to take some of these suggestions.

Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Chair, I feel that, in the study that we did, we simply did not get enough information for me to support this. There was a lot of discussion about other parliaments doing different methods. I don't think we had enough time to study that fully, and to propose this I just think goes way beyond where I feel comfortable with the knowledge base that I have.

I appreciate some of the amendments, but on the plan to go fully virtual, I feel that we did not get enough information about that. That's why in our proposal, which is in this section a little further down, we talked about an incremental approach. I think we heard from multiple witnesses that there needs to be an incremental or staggered approach where we test things and go back, so I'm not comfortable supporting this.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. Brassard, and then we'll find out if the Liberals are willing to take some of these suggestions into their recommendation.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, speaking to this point, I agree with Ms. Blaney on the fully virtual side of things, but I do think, if we're going to speak about an incremental approach on this, the hybrid model is one that not only can we be comfortable in recommending, but clearly the House administration, including the Speaker, indicated that the hybrid model will work.

We've seen it in other jurisdictions, other parliaments and the Westminster Parliament, which I would argue is the mother of all parliaments, and if it's the mother of all parliaments, then we are a child of that parliament. If it's good enough for the Westminster system, then it should be good enough for us.

Furthermore, I would suggest to you as well that we've heard, particularly from Ms. Blaney and Ms. Petitpas Taylor, about their concern about coming to Ottawa. It would alleviate some of that concern and provide a more regionalized approach and an opportunity for members to engage in a hybrid Parliament, including those who would prefer to come to Parliament. Of course the whips would determine that, but I think it would provide the opportunity and the inclusivity that everyone spoke about during the testimony and expressed concern about as well, and that might be where we need to go on this as a recommendation.

I agree with Mr. Richards that this would be a very incremental, if you will, approach. It would be a very practical approach, given the Speaker's and the Clerk's correspondence to us—and I don't think I'm speaking out of turn; I'm not sure whether that was confidential or not—but if the House is adjourned at this point and is scheduled to come back on May 25, this could set a direction on the part of the leaders of all parties to work towards, implement and implement in a good way, in a very practical way, which would satisfy all members of Parliament, I would suspect.

• (1810)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brassard and Ms. Blaney.

Next is Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I just wanted to participate in this debate.

I think the intentions of this recommendation were to acknowledge the significant public health risk that's before us, but also to anticipate the potential need for additional capacity around a fully functioning virtual Parliament if there is a second or third wave of this pandemic in the future.

Also, I think the wording is intentional in terms of undertaking the necessary steps to expand the House's capacity. It is reflective of an incremental approach. It doesn't preclude us from slowly implementing and evaluating every step of the way. To be fair, we included the realization, given the limited capacity that we know the House has at the moment, to say that the hybrid model in the interim would really be something we value and can serve the purpose for the time being.

However, why not develop the capacity for Parliament to operate virtually, especially knowing that there may be second and third waves of this pandemic? We don't want to put people's health at risk by calling them back too early, or, in cases where we do call them back and there's a surge, we may be suspending, and we may find ourselves back in the same situation.

Therefore, instead of repeating the past, we would be thinking ahead and being proactive and progressive about developing that capacity now, which I think is a positive, progressive way to look at this current issue.

The Chair: Madam Normandin.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I also think the way the proposal is written means that there is no result-based obligation, but that can be introduced gradually. We are leaning toward that objective, contrary to the proposal made by the Conservatives a bit earlier. I don't see the irony because the Conservative proposal contained a result-based obligation. We want to make all the committees operate as in normal times without any problems, but we have not discussed the issue of committees. No experts have spoken about committees when we considered the matter, but experts have talked about the possibility of having virtual parliamentary sittings and about that approach having worked in the past.

In this context, I am comfortable with the proposal as drafted. I don't see any obstacles to this being done gradually, and it has an objective. There is no result-based obligation.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I want to comment on Ms. Blaney's comments and others I've heard.

The fundamental aspect of a virtual Parliament, which we just passed as a committee, is making sure that we prepare a set of standing orders for a virtual Parliament.

This second recommendation just asks the House administration to make sure that we have the capacity. We heard about Internet issues, headsets, and all that type of stuff. This recommendation asks that the House be ready in its capacity and operations to meet what we said in recommendation one. It is not a requirement that the House move to recommendation one. It asks that the House prepare itself for the time when we as members of Parliament choose to implement recommendation one.

I wanted to make sure that clarification was added because recommendation one only talks about the standing orders. It doesn't talk about the hardware, the software, and the preparation that needs to take place in order for us to get there.

• (1815)

The Chair: While you're still here, Mr. Alghabra, are you okay with Ms. Petitpas Taylor adding "in the event of extraordinary circumstances"?

There was also a suggestion made by Mr. Richards about removing "virtual Parliament" and leaving it at "hybrid Parliament" only. Are you okay with those?

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I'm okay with Ms. Petitpas Taylor's suggestion. I agree that we should maybe clarify when that is needed.

Mr. Richards' suggestion makes the whole recommendation null, so no, I'm not okay with it.

The Chair: Right now, we're discussing the amended version of LIB 2, which includes the language "in the event of extraordinary circumstances".

Mr. Duncan, you had a comment to make.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Madam Chair, again, while I appreciate the amendments by Ms. Petitpas Taylor in an effort to get a compro-

mise, I'll just go back to the idea "with the possibility of employing a hybrid model in the interim". I'm hoping to have a discussion here to hear from government members and others that the hybrid model should be the foundation of what we're doing, and as we build that capacity it's done from the hybrid model out.

To Mr. Turnbull's and Mr. Alghabra's point, heaven forbid we have a second or a third wave. I hope we don't, but I fully agree with you that it might go up and down. Recommendations from provinces and regions about physical attendance may go up and may go down, and some travel may be restricted at times. It's the hybrid model that can be the foundation, not in the interim, but the foundation of everything. As we need to go up and down, we're using the chamber as our basis for everything.

My concern with this is the tone we're setting is saying, "Well, the hybrid is interim and it will go away when virtual is at full capacity." I don't agree with that. If it's not the case that we support hybrid, I think we need to be clearer that hybrid can be the foundation, and go back and forth on that.

The Chair: Maybe Mr. Alghabra has a suggestion there.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Yes.

Mr. Duncan, the foundation is not actually a hybrid. The foundation is the real traditional model of Parliament. We are talking about extraordinary circumstances.

All this recommendation is saying is that we call on the House administration to prepare its capacity. It doesn't talk about the implementation. It doesn't talk about when we should go to hybrid and when we should go to virtual. It just recommends to the House of Commons administration to prepare its infrastructure to be ready. Maybe we'll never need it, but if we come to a point where we need it, we don't want the physical infrastructure to be the obstacle to get us there.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair—

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I support Mr. Alghabra's comments. I think that helps. The public health advice that we've heard is that having people in the same physical space obviously, no matter what, poses more risk than having people come together virtually. I think the idea here is to develop that capacity ahead of when we'll actually need it so that we don't run into a circumstance where we don't have that capacity and therefore would not be able to operate virtually.

Maybe we do see it differently from you, Mr. Duncan, but I agree with Mr. Alghabra's point that the physical space of the House of Commons is the foundation of all of the proceedings of the House. I recognize the validity of what you're saying and the perspective you're bringing to this. I think we just see it a little bit differently.

• (1820)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

I'm having a bit of a problem with my participants list. Madam Normandin, were you trying to make a comment as well?

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: If we just removed the words “in the interim”, would that resolve the issue?

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Duncan: At first glance, I think that's certainly something that can get us there that way.

The Chair: Did everyone hear me when I read that out? No? Okay.

I'll read that out again.

It will read, “Undertake necessary steps to expand the House's capacity and operations to achieve a fully virtual Parliament, with the possibility of employing a hybrid model in the event of extraordinary circumstances.”

Do we have agreement to adopt this recommendation?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: There seems to be general agreement to adopt this recommendation.

Andre, do you have a question?

Mr. Andre Barnes: Could I please make a quick comment?

I would just say, for consistency, in recommendation one the language was “exceptional” as opposed to “extraordinary”.

The Chair: Yes, I agree that we should be consistent.

Thanks for catching that, Andre.

It looks as though everyone agrees as well.

Mr. John Brassard: I don't agree, but....

The Chair: I mean in terms of using the consistent word. Of course, we know that you weren't....

Mr. John Brassard: On this particular recommendation, Madam Chair, I'm going to call for a recorded vote.

The Chair: Justin, could you help us with the recorded vote, please.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Could I speak to this quickly?

The Chair: Do you mean to the recorded vote?

Mr. Eric Duncan: I mean to the motion on that. I'll be quick.

I am more comfortable, but still not comfortable or not quite there yet.

Again, this is about a conversation here. To Mr. Alghabra and Mr. Turnbull's point about what we have virtually right now, it's not in the chamber of the House of Commons. My understanding, from when I tuned in, is that the Speaker is sitting in a committee room, and we're not dealing with parliamentary business and those types of things. Right now, over the virtual aspect we do have, there is a little bit of a difference there.

Again, I think wording that talks about support for a hybrid system as the basis, and building capacity and technology out from there, better wording, would make me, as one member, more comfortable with the general direction and tone of this report. I think that when we say the words “fully virtual Parliament”, we're giving up on that physical presence. I just don't think there's enough clarity.

I'll leave it at that for now. I'm sure we'll be continuing this as well as a few other items.

The Chair: We'll have a recorded vote.

Justin, perhaps you could help us out with the vote.

(Text of recommendation as modified agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

Mr. John Brassard: On a point of order, Madam Chair, we're at 6:24 p.m. I don't know about the rest of you, but I would like a bit of a break. I don't think we've even discussed the option of moving forward and how we are going to do that past the allotted time. I have something at seven o'clock that I need to be at. It's not physical; it's virtual. But I do need a break right now, frankly.

• (1825)

The Chair: Seven o'clock is not that far away either.

Can we all agree to temporarily suspend for 10 minutes?

I know that's not enough time to really grab food, but I want to have that time to discuss, because we may not be back for very long after that. Let me discuss with the clerk, the analysts and the whole support team what arrangements can be made in order to continue going through this report at this time or another.

We will suspend for 10 minutes.

• (1825)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1840)

The Chair: I think everyone is curious as to how long we're going to go and what our options are. Right now, I feel like I don't have many options. We've been asked to get this report in for May 15, which is this Friday, and we're not going to meet that deadline if we don't have it completed today. That's where this stands right now. If we don't get through this, the report won't be completed by the deadline because, administratively, they need the time tomorrow to turn this around and have it submitted for Friday.

I want to ask the members for general consensus about moving forward. We can try to aim for 8:00 and see how much we can get through. I think we can do it. I really do think that the really tough, meaty recommendations were the ones we spent all our time on, which is good, because now we have them done. A lot of the other ones are very good recommendations, but I think the big ones have been completed, and maybe we can move on more quickly.

This means that you may need to work with your whips to get substitutes if you need a substitute in this case.

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm just being told that the live stream on which people are following us has been taken down and is not back up now that we've restarted. I thought I'd better point that out. I know there are people who are following along, including people who are in support of some of us. We may want to get that resolved.

The Chair: Yes, I will get that resolved right away. Let's take a little bit of a longer break, knowing that we're going to come back and be here until eight or nine o'clock. We just need to get through this. As long as the team is there, I'm hoping we can aim for eight o'clock, but I'm just shooting that out there as a goal.

I think we can get it done. I really do. Maybe we can take a little bit of a longer recess so that you can eat something and come back when we have the video issue resolved. Go freshen up a little bit and come back at seven o'clock. Thank you.

• (1840) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1900)

The Chair: The committee is back in session.

I thank you all for the hard work you have done. As I was saying previously, I think we have done a lot of the heavy lifting.

We are on BQ 1 and BQ 2. These recommendations, as I noted and the analyst noted, come up again in section (c), which is entitled "Uphold the rights, immunities and privileges of the House and its members". It's in two sections currently.

Maybe we can hear from Madame Normandin on what section she prefers this to be in. I think section (c) talks a lot more about members being able to participate fully, so perhaps it's better there. I have no preference, really, as long as it's somewhere. We can talk about the actual amendments.

Do you have a preference?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: No, not really. Either option is okay with me. The expansion of technological operations also applies somewhat. In fact, I am asking for something very technical in my recommendations.

[*English*]

The Chair: One moment. We didn't have interpretation there. I think Andre is looking into that.

Justin, are we good for both recording and translation now? Yes? Okay.

Go ahead, Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I have no preference. It could be either in section (b) or section (c). That also affects the expansion of technological parameters, as I am asking for a different way to intervene, other than immunities and privileges. So the two options are fine with me.

[*English*]

The Chair: Andre, do you have a suggestion on where you would like it better?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Andre Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am of the same mind as Ms. Normandin.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

We know that we can have it in only one section. Should we leave it up to Andre to decide which section it goes in? We'll just look at adopting the content of the recommendation. Is everyone in favour of adopting the content of BQ 1?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We have general agreement on that one. BQ 1 is adopted.

We will move to BQ 2. It's about making sure an electronic system is prepared in order to hear the members who rise.

Is everyone okay with that one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. There's agreement on BQ 2.

Now we are on BQ 11, which reads, "That the House of Commons conduct a mock virtual parliament exercise prior to the deployment of the platform to be used for parliamentary business."

Of course, we should always test things out before we do them.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm wondering if we could add something to that. This is just off the top of my head, so I don't have the language, but perhaps we could add something that says all represented parties would be participating. It wouldn't be every member, necessarily. It would just be making sure that there's a recognition of inclusion.

• (1905)

The Chair: Madame Normandin, are you okay with that inclusion?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I don't even know if the MPs need to participate, because it's a mock-up, but that's fine.

The Chair: Andre, would you be able to draft some language off the cuff and help us out here?

Mr. Andre Barnes: Absolutely, Madam Chair.

Could Ms. Blaney please repeat the gist of what she was hoping to see? I'll work something up.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Absolutely. I'd just like something that says that all recognized parties will have representation at the mock-up.

The Chair: As a side note for everyone while Andre's preparing that wording, I started having some issues with my participants list before we went on break. You might be able to raise your hand in the sidebar, but I cannot see it anymore. I've tried to correct the problem, but it's not correcting without my maybe logging out. I probably should have done that when we were on break. If you could raise your hand to get my attention, just as you would in a regular committee meeting, I'll try to keep track manually as to who raises a hand and in what order. Justin, maybe you can help me out a little there as well.

Andre, do you have some language?

Mr. Andre Barnes: Let me know what the committee thinks of this: "That the House of Commons conduct a mock virtual Parliament exercise prior to the deployment of the platform to be used for parliamentary business, and that all recognized parties", I was thinking, "be invited to participate in any mock-ups." That way, the parties would have the option to participate or not.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Can I propose that instead of "all parties", you put "all members"? We all have rights as members, independent of our parties, and if the goal of a mock-up is to test if a system's working for everybody, I think it should say "all members". Obviously that means all parties, not just chosen delegates of parties.

The Chair: Madame Normandin, are you okay with that addition?

You are. Okay.

All right, Andre, I think you can handle that for sure.

BQ 11 is amended so that all members are invited. Is everyone in agreement to adopt that recommendation?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair, could we include an "s" after "platform", please? It may not just be one; it could be multiple platforms.

The Chair: Okay, it's "platforms" in the plural. Are we agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right. BQ 11 is adopted.

Is there any discussion on NDP 3? It is "That the House of Commons continue to take an incremental approach to the adoption of new House proceedings by virtual means, recognizing capacity constraints, the need for testing, and the need for improvements, and that any new proceedings to be added be agreed upon by each recognized party."

Is everyone in agreement with NDP 3?

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I want to express concern about the last part of that statement, the part that says, "and that any new proceedings to be added be agreed upon by each recognized party."

I wonder whether every incremental step needs to be approved by every party. I think that would stall or could potentially stall that

process. Without that, I would be fully supportive of this recommendation. I think it's a good recommendation, especially the part about "recognizing capacity constraints, the need for testing, and the need for improvements".

• (1910)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: It's not for each incremental step. It's for any new proceedings. It means that if something new is going to be added, there would be a collaborative approach to make sure it's done well. I believe that's important, but I would love to hear other people's feedback.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on that point?

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Just for clarification, first of all, Madam Chair, are you no longer able to see the electronic hands raised?

The Chair: No, I am not.

Mr. Blake Richards: Just to be clear, that's what—

The Chair: I am not. I'm going to continue to try to fix the problem, but in the meantime, just keep raising your hand.

Mr. Blake Richards: No problem.

I have a different change that I'd like to propose. Essentially it would make it clearer that this is for emergency situations. The wording as it stands now doesn't make that clear, but I assume that was the intention.

I propose that it would read like this at the beginning: "That the House of Commons continue to take an incremental approach to the adoption, during emergency situations, of new..."

The Chair: Okay. There seems to be agreement from the NDP to that change.

Go ahead, Mr. Alhabra.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: I'm going to be an Andre here and suggest that it say "exceptional circumstances".

The Chair: Yes, of course. I'm sure Andre would have pointed that out.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Omar's on fire today. He's doing great. He's a wordsmith.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Turnbull had also made a suggestion—or comments, really. It was not a revision.

Are we okay to move forward with the recommendation with the amendment from Mr. Richards?

Go ahead, Madame Normandin.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Perhaps certain terms should be reviewed. In French, it says, “les délibérations de la Chambre se fassent en ligne”. That could be referring to the telephone or to something else. I would more specifically talk about a “Parlement virtuel”.

[English]

The Chair: That's a good point. Andre has that correction for the French version.

We are looking at the original NDP 3 recommendation with the amendment proposed by Mr. Richards.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm sorry. I don't mean to belabour this point, but I'm interested in understanding from Ms. Blaney what new House proceedings we're referring to. I'm not sure I understand what new proceedings are going to be added. I get that the intention of it is that it would only apply to new proceedings that are added, which is different from how I initially interpreted it. Maybe that could be clarified in some way, or you could give an example. I didn't really understand what new proceedings we were going to be adding.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Blaney and then Mr. Alghabra.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: During the testimony, we heard from several witnesses that taking an incremental approach made sense. In some ways, the COVI committee is one step toward virtual Parliament. We're not there, obviously. This is about the steps that may be added.

For example, Mr. Bosc talked about having a proper question period and maybe having a themed process, and then, after that goes well, moving on to the next process. We tried to use language that was general enough. If you have any thoughts about how to make that more specific, I'm more than happy to consider them.

Just as every new aspect of this is added to what a normal sitting day in Parliament would be, there would be collaboration among the parties to address any issues that may arise so that it is done in a positive way. During that kind of circumstance, collaboration is just something I feel is beneficial.

I hope that answers your question.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Alghabra might have some suggestions.

• (1915)

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Perhaps we could replace the word “proceedings” with “standing orders”, because in our first recommendation we refer to introducing a new set of standing orders for exceptional circumstances. Perhaps, to be consistent, we can use the same reference.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm not sure that does it. I don't know if there's advice from the clerk regarding whether that makes sense.

Right now, we're doing petitions. The next step might be tabling a private member's bill. To me, those are proceedings, and I just want to make sure that the Standing Orders would actually cover that.

Chair, if you could, advise us on our next steps there.

The Chair: I think you're right to ask the clerk to weigh in on this matter.

The Clerk: If the wording of the recommendation is to cover the various activities that go on during a sitting day, “proceedings” might be the more accurate way to reflect it in your suggested recommendation.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I hope that brings clarity to the committee.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm still having trouble with the wording “new House proceedings”. I just feel that it could be easily misinterpreted. I don't have a better solution.

When I read it first, I thought it was referring to newly adopted proceedings that were normal House proceedings but that would be adopted into a virtual setting incrementally. That might have just been my bias, because looking through some of the recommendations that we made on our side, I may have interpreted it that way.

I wonder if we could clarify that these would be additional House proceedings that were not part of the regular proceedings of the House. That's what I'm hoping.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Would “any added parliamentary activities” be better than “proceedings”?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I would feel more comfortable with that, intuitively.

The Chair: Then “proceedings” would be replaced by “added parliamentary”, or...? What was that suggestion?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: It would be “added parliamentary activities”. We would remove “new proceedings” and then say “any added parliamentary activities to be added”. I hope that helps.

The Chair: Does that broaden it even more, or does that narrow it? I'm not sure.

If everyone's okay with it, I'll look for consensus on my screen. Is everyone okay with this recommendation?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: NDP 3 passes. Obviously these are going to be renumbered. The recommendations are going to look a little different in the final report, but we'll just call it what it is right now in the draft report to keep it straight. I know that I messed up earlier.

Now we're moving on to NDP 4 A. i. (b)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: You can just say NDP 4. Don't worry about it. That was just us trying to be helpful for the analyst and say where we thought those recommendations would fit, but the numbers are correct. Sorry about that.

The Chair: Okay, it's NDP 4, which is “That the Clerk of the House prepare and table with the committee, a report on what and in which order House of Commons proceedings are ready to be implemented virtually.”

Go ahead, Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I have a question for clarification. Can we consider the report that the Speaker just sent to us as almost a fulfillment of this request?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I considered that, but I wasn't clear. Also, the recommendation came prior to that, so that's one. I wasn't sure if it was in a confidential place. It has been given to the committee, but it's not public. I was unclear about that, so I left it there.

• (1920)

Hon. Omar Alhabra: I have no problem with the recommendation.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: It's the same thing for the French version. If possible, we should replace “en ligne” by “le Parlement virtuel”.

[*English*]

The Chair: Andre, you may have to check through the whole French version to make sure that's not everywhere.

Do we have agreement on the original NDP 4?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We will go on to page 30 of the draft report.

Madame Normandin, that would be section (c), the rights and immunities section. Since we've already passed BQ 1 and BQ 2, we're only going to be looking at LIB 3 and LIB 4.

LIB 3 states:

Ensure the rights, immunities, and privileges of the House and its members.

That's generally what the whole section is about. Do we have agreement to adopt this one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: LIB 4 states:

Ensure a consistent standard for hardware, software, and internet connectivity is available for MPs' in their constituencies paid for through the central budget.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm in support of this one. I do just want to say that there is a recommendation, NDP 5, on page 35, and I would love to see it moved, because I see them as very comparable and similar.

The Chair: Hold on. I'll find that. I remember that one as well.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I think it's in the “Ensure accessibility of proceedings” section.

The Chair: Perfect. It's NDP 5 on page 35 in the English version, and it's in section (e), “Ensure accessibility of proceedings.”

NDP 5 states:

That the House ensure that all Members of Parliament have access to the telecommunications infrastructure necessary to attend virtual proceedings in their constituency offices; and until that time, that Members of Parliament unable to connect to virtual proceedings in times they are necessary due to insufficient telecommunications infrastructure in their riding be compensated for travel to and provided the appropriate equipment and venue to participate in the virtual proceedings from a nearby location outside of their riding that has the necessary telecommunications infrastructure.

There are a lot of hands up.

Maybe we can amalgamate these somehow, and you guys have some suggestions.

We will go to Mr. Duncan and then Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

On the NDP recommendation, I think it's supportable. The only thing I'd like to clarify is that, as opposed to “constituency offices”, perhaps we can say “constituency”. Some members may be very far from their office. Their home or another venue may be more appropriate, so basically that's just saying it's available in their constituencies as opposed to “constituency offices”.

The Chair: Yes, and LIB 4 has “constituencies” in it, and I think that was the thought process there, but it also refers to the central budget, so I'm wondering how that could also be included.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I had flagged these as well as being very compatible. My opinion is that NDP 5 has more to it, but if we thought about combining an aspect of the LIB 4 recommendation with NDP 5 and keeping the integrity of both by combining them, I have a suggestion for the wording. The strength of the LIB 4 recommendation, from my perspective, is identifying “hardware, software, and internet connectivity” and then making sure we have “paid for through the central budget”.

If I may, I could suggest some wording. It's a bit long, but hopefully it will be well received.

• (1925)

The Chair: It probably has most of the wording of NDP 5, right? Should we just follow along on NDP 5, and you're going to insert something, or how is it going to work?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, most of the changes are to the first half of NDP 5.

The Chair: We're going to jump ahead so that perhaps we can look at adopting NDP 5 and removing LIB 4.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I agree with Ms. Blaney that NDP 5 with an addition or amendment should be moved up. I think that's what she is saying. Right now it sits in “ensure accessibility of proceedings”. I think it's probably better suited to the previous section.

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a point of order. Can someone help me find NDP 5?

The Chair: Are you on the draft version that we received the other day?

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm not sure. I have version 2.

The Chair: Yes, that's the version. NDP 5 is on page 35, line 11. Then LIB 4 is line 8 on page 30.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thanks.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, I think you wanted to say something before Mr. Turnbull starts.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: No, I'm just interested to hear what Mr. Turnbull has to say.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: The amended version would be, "That the House ensure that all members of Parliament have access to the telecommunications infrastructure including consistent standard hardware, software and Internet connectivity necessary to attend virtual proceedings."

To Mr. Duncan's point, it would say "in their constituency" and take out the word "offices", and then "paid for through the central budget."

Then the rest, from the semicolon on, would be identical: "and until that time, that members of Parliament". I won't read that part because I think you all have it.

The Chair: Does everyone agree to NDP 5?

We're also going to have NDP 5 moved up to section (c), "Uphold the rights, immunities and privileges of the House and its members".

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Andre, have you got that?

All right. NDP 5 is adopted and moved. LIB 4 is going to be removed.

We are moving on to page 32 of the English version, and section (d) on upholding language rights.

LIB 5 says, "Ensure we that we are respecting the status and use of the Official Languages Act of Canada."

Is everyone in agreement to respect the Official Languages Act?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I didn't think I would get opposition to that one. That was the only one that I was confident about the whole time.

LIB 5 is adopted as is.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Chair, I just want to point out that yesterday we decided that there should be another recommendation added here around indigenous languages. I'm wondering if we could get an update on that so we know what we're saying yes to.

The Chair: I don't know. I recall having the discussion, but I don't recall what we decided to do. Was it on my plate to do something about that?

Could you remind me, Ms. Blaney? Mr. Duncan, do you remember?

Mr. Eric Duncan: I remember the discussion yesterday. I made a note on it. I'm just wondering, with Ms. Blaney, about the many lists of things that our committee probably needs to continue to have a conversation on. Would that be something that needed to be acknowledged there, but would be part of our future work? In that last section, could we have that acknowledged as an item, to say that's an extra feature?

I think that's going to present some translation and technology issues with Zoom or an interpretation platform. I'm interested in that. I think we have to take a look at how we can make that work.

• (1930)

The Chair: I think that our discussion was that we haven't been able to ask our witnesses whether these platforms would be able to accommodate indigenous languages and that we could make a recommendation to look at that question in further study.

Perhaps Andre has something that could help.

Mr. Andre Barnes: Madame Chair, as an update to version 3 of the report, which you haven't seen because we weren't able to have it translated in time, I added language to an earlier part of this section. It would be in the second paragraph, under part (d), "Uphold language rights". If you bear with me, it would read,

"Further, the Speaker"—and this is existing language already in the report—"of the House told the Committee that it is his view that members should also 'continue to have access to established processes for the interpretation of indigenous languages.' The Committee agrees with the Speaker."

That is existing wording from version 2.

I added, "The committee also notes that it has not heard evidence about the technological capabilities of the House to provide simultaneous interpretation for indigenous languages during the pandemic. The committee encourages the House to examine options for ensuring the processes for the interpretation of indigenous languages continue during the pandemic."

The Chair: Could we use that same language as our recommendation, "the committee encourages", and make that into a recommendation?

Ms. Blaney, would that be...?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I would be very content with that. I know part of the conversation was around what capacity Zoom had to do that kind of work, and the fact that we didn't know. It's just that I don't want that to get lost in the report.

Thank you so much, everyone.

The Chair: Perfect. Thanks for bringing that up.

Andre, could you put that language right into a recommendation in that section?

I think he's doing that.

Is the committee okay with adopting that recommendation, for the House to ensure...?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right, then I think we are through the language rights section—oh, no, we're not. Sorry, I'm jumping ahead of myself.

We have LIB 15. We have LIB 16. We have a lot more. I don't know why I thought....

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: In the spirit of collaboration, I see a number of alignments again in some suggestions that are made here in the recommendations. I want to see if there is a possibility of combining some of them. I think that LIB 15 is reflective of the recommendations that were put forth by the witnesses. I can't remember the names of the two—

The Chair: Do you mean the Translation Bureau, maybe? No, it was the association....

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, I think it was the association of conference interpreters. I'm sorry, but I'm forgetting names right now. My brain's a little bit tired, so forgive me. Essentially, I think we adopted a lot of those.

One thing we talked about as a group, which I think is actually addressed in the BQ 4 recommendation and in the NDP 6 recommendation, is to have a minimum standard rather than indicating very specific technology that would be required in order to be recognized to speak in a virtual proceeding. It seems to me that what we really want to do—and this is expressed well in both the Bloc and the NDP's recommendations on this—is to essentially adopt a minimum standard or require more quality criteria.

I was thinking that potentially we could amend the first paragraph of LIB 15 to include that wording, and then potentially we wouldn't need BQ 4 and NDP 6.

The Chair: Would you be able to read through what that wording would look like?

Then I have Madame Normandin and then Ms. Blaney on the list as well. Would you be able to propose language?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, I could. I just wonder if we could see if the other parties and participants here were amenable to that before I suggest wording. Maybe other people have other wording to suggest. I'm fine with that. I'm not attached to it.

● (1935)

The Chair: Okay.

We will go to Madame Normandin, then Ms. Blaney and then Mr. Richards.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I agree with merging the recommendations as much as possible.

I have something to point out regarding the LIB 15 recommendation.

If we get overly specific concerning the technological aspect, we should consider that we may be overtaken by the technology and that we will have to review the wording at some point. We should have something a bit more general, indicating that we will respect the interpreters' current recommendations. It may be simpler to operate in that way.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's a good point.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I agree so much with that point. I am agreeable to merging them. That's what I have in my notes as well. I

think there should be language around “minimum standard”. I agree with you. I think that's pretty strong. I want to make sure that the language also talks about “in consultation with the Translation Bureau”. I really want to make sure that voice is heard, and it sounds like everybody else does as well.

The other thing, though, is that if you look at our recommendation, we mentioned “headset” or “microphone”. I think Mr. Gerretsen talked about having ear issues. If somebody uses a very good microphone...as long as the interpreters can hear clearly, I think their needs have to be the top priority here.

Then, in the final bullet of the Liberal recommendation, I want to add “where possible”, please. It says, “Written texts must be provided to the interpreters in advance.” I certainly do my best to do that when I can, but often I talk off the cuff. I don't plan what I'm going to say exactly, so I just wanted to add that.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Richards and then back to Madame Normandin.

Mr. Blake Richards: I share a lot of the same thoughts as Ms. Blaney and Madame Normandin.

I have a number of other questions around LIB 15, but first I think it is far too prescriptive and gets into far too much detail.

Of the three, I think the favourable one would be NDP 6. I think it says it pretty well. It's “a minimum standard” for some equipment. It could be a headset or microphone. It meets the standard that is required but doesn't box us in for unique situations. It could be hearing aids that interfere with the headset or something like that, right?

I think NDP 6 is good as is. My preference would be to see us adopt that one of the three, rather than trying to combine them. The other ones are just too prescriptive.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I am leaning toward wanting to replace the portion of the LIB 15 recommendation about the headset with our recommendation, as it suggests that a headset be provided by the House.

We hope that the House will provide something of quality. Alternatively, it should provide something that makes it possible to meet the translation bureau's criteria. In my opinion, if we replace one with the other, the recommendation will be complete.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Is there any proposed wording, then? I think there's not full agreement as to where to land, but there's agreement about the gist of what we want. We don't want to be too prescriptive, so the prescriptive language has to be taken out, I guess.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I completely agree with all the comments.

Mr. Blake Richards: On a point of order, Madam Chair—sorry to interrupt here—I'm getting word again that the ParlVU stream is down again.

The Chair: Okay, we'll pause for a moment.

Justin, do you...?

The Clerk: I'm told that the technicians are aware of the problem and they're working on trying to resolve the issue. It appears to be an issue with ParlVU. They are on it, and they're trying to address it right now.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Madam Chair, are we recording the proceedings anyway?

The Chair: Justin, are we recording?

The Clerk: Yes, Madam Chair, the meeting is being fully recorded for the purpose of Parliamentary Publications. In that sense, the meeting is still completely and properly in order.

There is the issue with the transmission from ParlVU, which, as I mentioned, they are trying to address right now.

● (1940)

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm not trying to disagree with anything that's been said by the clerk, certainly. I'm sure that the meeting is completely in order. However, Madam Chair, given the uniqueness of the circumstance....

We're not in committee rooms and we all have support staff who are not able to see this unless they're able to view it on ParlVU. There are occasions when something comes up that we want to ask a support staff member a question about. If they're not able to view the proceedings, they won't be able to give us advice. That impinges upon our ability as members to function to the best of our ability.

I'm not trying to cause a problem here—

The Chair: I know.

Mr. Blake Richards: —in our way of doing things, but I think it's important that we have that, if it's at all feasible, before we continue.

The Chair: Yes, and that's why I was kind of pausing. I had a feeling that some of the members would feel that way; or that a lot of the members would.

Clerk, do you have any further update?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I don't have any additional information, other than they are continuing to work on it. I don't have a sense at this point of just what sort of issue it is or how long it may take to address it.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Can I propose that we invite staff to join in this Zoom room? They would at least be able to witness the proceedings directly through Zoom.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I know that with the Zoom platform, folks can call in and just have audio of the proceedings. That might be a

nice alternative so that the images don't distract from the discussion among members.

It's just a thought.

The Chair: Yes. There is a calling option for all of the staff. I know that my staff has used that.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, that's right in the information that was emailed to all members of the committee. It includes emails for staff members as well. The emails list a phone line, called Resolve, that staff members can use to call in. There are code numbers for them to choose the floor feed, the English feed or the French feed.

That could be an option for them in order to listen in.

The Chair: Is that in the reoccurring emails that we get in order to log in to these meetings?

The Clerk: That's exactly right. That's where the information would be. The distribution list contains staffers of the different members.

The Chair: Yes, we got a reminder today, just before this meeting, with the link to log in. That same reminder lists how to watch and listen to the meeting.

Mr. Richards, are you able to inform your staff about that?

Mr. Blake Richards: I have informed my team, yes.

The Chair: Okay. Perfect. Does anybody else need to inform their team? No? Okay.

In the meantime, we're still going to try to get the ParlVU option up as well.

Mr. Turnbull, you were about to give us some proposed language.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I agree with Mr. Richards that one of the recommendations captured this quite nicely. However, I feel that it might be important for our recommendations to reflect some of the concerns that the interpreters provided.

I would propose that we change LIB 15 to say “To ensure the best-quality audio for enabling quality interpretation during virtual proceedings, the Speaker of the House and chairs of parliamentary committees shall provide a headset or microphone with a minimum standard set in consultation with the Translation Bureau.”

I would suggest that we eliminate all the rest of that paragraph, which gets into very specific, prescriptive details about hardware. I'm not sure that's necessary. Then the recommendation could continue.

I would also suggest, based on Ms. Blaney's comment, that written text must be provided to the interpreters in advance whenever possible. I think that's a really important suggestion, because it's not always going to be possible.

Did that come through okay?

● (1945)

The Chair: I'm sorry; I was on mute, and I'm trying to tell Mr. Brassard he's on mute.

Mr. Brassard, would you have something to say?

Oh, you can't get off mute. Okay.

Mr. Eric Duncan: He's never sounded better.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I can unmute.

The Chair: You can unmute?

Let's see if there are any remote issues.

There we go, Mr. Brassard, you're unmuted now.

You're unmuted, but we can't hear you.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, we're going to get an IT ambassador to call Mr. Brassard to see if they can address the technical issue.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Brassard, you may have heard that. An IT ambassador is going to contact you to resolve this issue.

We will just pause so that Mr. Brassard can participate fully.

Mr. John Brassard: Carry on.

The Chair: Okay. I think we were at the point where we were hearing from the analyst as to how you can take the suggestions that Mr. Turnbull has just given, the rough outline. Could you perhaps read that out so that we all have a better understanding of what the full recommendation would look like?

Mr. Alghabra, do you have a suggestion?

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Yes, with respect to my friend Mr. Turnbull, perhaps for simplicity's sake, I kind of agree with some of the comments mentioned earlier by Mr. Richards that NDP 6 is a good, concise recommendation that covers, in a broad sense, what we're trying to achieve, so perhaps we could drop LIB 15.

The Chair: Is everyone okay with that?

Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: If we remove the LIB 15 recommendation, little bits will be missing, especially when it comes to written texts and coordinators' support. It seems to me that we would lose some useful elements if we removed it.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard: I just unmuted.

The Chair: Yes, we can hear you, Mr. Brassard. I think it's sounding good now.

The recommendation reads, "Interpreters must have the assistance of an interpreter coordinator and onsite technician at all times."

Yes, Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Perhaps this will satisfy Madame Normandin. The fact that NDP 6 talks about collaborating with the interpreters and the translation bureau means that it would cover the needs in making sure that throughout this process their needs are taken into account.

The Chair: Are you saying that LIB 16 covers this? I don't see....

Hon. Omar Alghabra: No. In NDP 6, the fact that it says, "in consultation with the Translation Bureau" implies that all of the needs of the translation bureau and the interpreters are taken into account, without necessarily specifying. The risk is that if we start specifying which needs the interpreters may have, we may miss some or overemphasize others.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Perhaps I am mistaken, but the NPD 6 recommendation concerns only the headset.

[*English*]

The Chair: No, you're correct. It reads, "virtually use a headset or microphone that meets a minimum standard to be set by the Clerk of the House in consultation with the Translation Bureau." Yes, it does mention to consult only on that one particular issue, so maybe that could be broadened.

● (1950)

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes, you're clearer than you were before, I think.

Mr. John Brassard: Okay. I'm sorry that you all can hear me now.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Now you need better lighting.

Mr. John Brassard: Yes.

The Chair: There you go.

The analyst has a suggestion.

Mr. Andre Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

You were asking how we could broaden it. As a suggestion, it could read, "In any House proceeding virtually, including...."

Sorry, I'm getting this wrong. It is again fatigue.

The Chair: We're looking at NDP 6. Is that correct?

Mr. Andre Barnes: Yes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Do not say sorry.

Mr. Andre Barnes: I had something, and now it's gone. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Andre Barnes: It would read, "in any House proceeding virtually," so it would be any virtual proceeding, and then you could say, "including those that use a headset or microphone".

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Madam Chair, I think Madame Normandin is talking about some other things besides the headset and the audio, and this continues to address that. It's not really addressing the second half of other—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: The connection is bad.

Mr. Eric Duncan: My apologies.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: I think the analyst's recommendation meets that, because he's suggesting that the House of Commons adopt a rule with a minimum standard for all proceedings, including for headsets or microphones.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I must have cut out, but I agree. I apologize that the sound isn't better.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Is that right, Andre? That's what I understood.

The Chair: Madame Normandin, would that satisfy your concern?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll strike LIB 15.

Are we in agreement to adopt NDP 6?

There's one more point, from Mr. Alhabra.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: I agree, with the changes that the analyst proposed.

The Chair: Yes, this is with the changes proposed by the analyst.

Do we agree on the amended NDP 6?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I suggest that this would allow us to strike BQ 4. Is that correct? It talks about the same topic.

The Chair: Yes, that's correct.

Madame Normandin, is that okay?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Okay.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, so we'll strike BQ 4 and LIB 15.

Now we're looking at LIB 16, the recommendation regarding injuries and fatigue. This was mentioned in our meeting and in the recommendations we received.

Is everyone okay with adopting LIB 16?

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a question, more so than a comment, on this recommendation.

It obviously lists some pretty specific items. I generally tend to say that it might be better to stay away from doing this, but I don't know where they came from. When drafting these recommendations, was the House administration or the translation bureau consulted? Where did these very specific criteria come from?

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: These came directly out of the recommendations that were provided by the conference interpreters associa-

tion. I keep saying the name wrong, so my apologies, but I think you know what I'm referring to.

The Chair: Yes, I think you have it right, pretty much. It's close enough.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: The recommendations are directly from them. For example, the compressor limiters are specifically to prevent acoustic shock. These were very specific recommendations they made for their health and safety. We tried to adopt those almost completely, with no changes.

• (1955)

The Chair: Is everyone okay with this?

Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: In the translation, under the third point, it says "le gros de l'interprétation", which is a bit informal. I would like it to be changed to "la majorité de l'interprétation".

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Andre, do you have that?

Mr. Andre Barnes: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The second bullet point says, "Do a sound check with coordinator and technician before each meeting begins." This is great for our committee and is no problem, but I think for a virtual Parliament, when 200 or 300 of us come on and there are dozens of speakers, I don't want the poor testing team to think they're going to have to do 200 sound checks, twice a week. I understand where that comes from, but we may want to be a little more specific, with "where possible" or something, just to not burn them out.

The Chair: Okay, yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a concern along similar lines.

The Chair: Mr. Richards, I'm sorry. I started thinking about Mr. Duncan's suggestion, and....

Mr. Blake Richards: The reason I interjected is that I have a similar concern from a different perspective, so maybe we can come up with something after. My perspective on this one is the same concern. When we have House proceedings, it is very different from committee proceedings. In fact, I can even see this being an issue with committee proceedings. For example, today we had some members who have come and gone and new members have been introduced, so how do they do a sound check before the meeting starts? They wouldn't be able to. We don't want to suspend the meeting to allow for a sound check.

It becomes worse with the House proceedings. During question period, or whatever we're calling it right now, sometimes a member might not have a question that day, or it could be a member of the government who is not tasked with answering, but then suddenly a point of order arises that they want to raise. They haven't been sound-checked ahead of time, because maybe they didn't join the meeting at the beginning, and the same thing goes there. They might have another meeting they're participating in. They jump into the middle of that, something comes up, and they want to do a point of order. Are they now prevented from being able to do that because they weren't sound-checked ahead of the meeting?

I'm not trying to make this difficult, but maybe we need to change that a bit.

The Chair: I think a comment was just made that we do sound checks when possible, or....

Mr. Blake Richards: Perhaps saying "where possible" would at least not put us in the territory where we would possibly be infringing upon the members' rights and privileges. "Where possible" would at least give some wiggle room on that. It might work. I don't have a better suggestion, but I think it is something we have to resolve, because it could lead to problems.

The Chair: Maybe, Andre, you can put in something in terms of recommending that sound checks be done as often as possible.

Mr. Andre Barnes: I just added Mr. Richards' language, which was "where possible".

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Maybe a small stickler.... The main point at the top says, "Recommendation regarding injuries and fatigue". Shouldn't it be "Recommendations to prevent injuries and fatigue of interpreters"? It's unclear the way it's stated, and I would say it should be a bit clearer.

The Chair: Andre.

Mr. Andre Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

For the committee's information, I've been going through all the recommendations, as we go, to phrase them as recommendations, because sometimes they aren't. All recommendations have to say "that", because they're motions. In this particular case, this one would say, "That the House adopt standards to help safeguard simultaneous interpreters against injuries and fatigue, including", and then "ensuring compressor", "undergoing a sound check where possible", "increasing", etc.

• (2000)

The Chair: That's going to be way better than what it looks like right now.

The association's name is the International Association of Conference Interpreters. Just in case they're watching, here's a shout-out to them. Thank you for all your recommendations. We appreciate them.

Are we okay with adopting LIB 16?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We are on BQ 5: "That the Committee recommend that francophone members and witnesses make their representa-

tions in French during committee meetings in order to relieve the pressure on interpreters who interpret from English to French."

Yes, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I understand the intention of this recommendation, but I also recognize that the first clause of our Official Languages Act says that both languages are the official languages and that everyone has the right to use either. I wonder if this could potentially be seen as an infringement on parliamentary privilege.

The Chair: Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: The goal is for the francophone members to be aware that this can help. They are not obligated to speak in French. This is only so they know that it can help out the interpreters. It is absolutely not an obligation, but it is at least brought to their attention.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. I think it could probably be reworded to state that more accurately. Maybe it's very similar to the last one we did, "where possible", or it could state that it would be helpful for French members to speak French as much as possible.

Yes, Mr. Turnbull, maybe you have a suggestion, and then Mr. Alghabra.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I don't know if this is useful, but maybe we could soften the language to say "encourage": "That the committee encourage". I think this is an informal practice, rather than mandating it as a rule. That's the thought.

The Chair: Okay, that would be instead of "recommend".

We have Mr. Alghabra, and then Mr. Richards.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I was going to take a different route and suggest that we keep the word "recommend" but we say, "That the committee recommend that all members and witnesses be considerate to interpreters", including the suggestion of selecting one language throughout their speech.

The Chair: The problem is not just selecting one language, Omar. I think they also mentioned that the bulk of the work that's done by interpreters is English into French. If francophones could choose that language as much as possible, then the load would get shared.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Perhaps we would say "including recommending that francophone members and witnesses speak in French". I was just making it broader at the beginning and then adding the word "including" and being specific in the follow-up.

The Chair: Can you repeat what that would look like? I got mixed up with the suggestion about "encourage", and now this is a new suggestion that takes it out. Could you just read that?

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Okay. I was saying, “That the committee recommend that all members and witnesses be considerate towards interpreters, including the suggestion that francophone members and witnesses make their representations in French during committee meetings”.

The Chair: Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Yes, Mr. Richards, is this a point of order?

• (2005)

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, no, I believe I was on the list. Prior to this, you had indicated I was next to speak.

The Chair: Okay, yes. Your name is down.

We have Mr. Richards, and then Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm sympathetic with what the Bloc is trying to achieve here. I do understand there is a far greater demand for the English-to-French translation than for the French-to-English. I understand that trying to balance that makes some sense. However, I will point out that the Constitution guarantees the right to speak in either French or English during House proceedings. What we're suggesting here would, potentially, be unconstitutional. I think that would apply slightly less so if we were to say that we recommend it, but I still don't think we should be recommending something that runs contrary to the Constitution.

Although I understand and I'm sympathetic toward what they are trying to achieve, I think we should be mindful of the fact that the Constitution does guarantee the right to choose to speak in either English or French. To go down the road where we are even suggesting that maybe we give some encouragement to speak one language or the other could be perceived as going against someone's rights that are guaranteed under the Constitution.

As a result, I think we should stay away from this.

The Chair: Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

[Translation]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: In keeping with the spirit of this recommendation, I will speak in French.

Honestly, I have nothing against the wording to the effect that the committee should encourage people to speak in French or in English. I am not a lawyer, but I don't think it is unconstitutional to encourage someone to speak in either English or French.

I would really like to hear Ms. Normandin's comments. I know that she is a lawyer, so she could give us her opinion on this issue. I think the message is simply that we want to encourage our witnesses to speak in the language of their choice, be that English or French. What is more, this does not concern only the interpreters. It is also tiring for us, the francophone members, who always have our earpiece in. It is sometimes taken for granted that bilingual members can listen to witnesses in both languages.

I think that this recommendation is very important. I am in favour of wording that encourages witnesses and francophone members to speak in the language of their choice.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Brassard is next, and then Madame Normandin.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm not using my headset, because it's not working.

I was listening to some of the proceedings going on in the House today. I see that Mr. Nater is on the Zoom call here, and he was in the House. There was an interaction between, I believe, the leader of the Bloc and Mr. Rodriguez, the government House leader. In that interaction, Mr. Rodriguez was quite adamant in suggesting that we don't have a first official language and a second official language; we actually have two official languages.

I would urge members to keep that in mind. Mr. Rodriguez brought that up today in the House, and I think he made a very valid point. It's a point that I respect. I certainly respect both official languages. Being a person who was born in Quebec, I understand that, but we have to be mindful of this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Yes.

Madame Normandin, maybe you can help us get to a point where.... I think everyone wants to respect the languages, but also to respect choice. How can we get there, so that we can adopt this recommendation?

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I am not a constitutional expert, but I would lean towards believing that there is nothing coercive about the word “encourage”. The objective is to draw francophones' attention to the fact that speaking in their mother tongue can lighten the interpreters' burden, as it may be something they are unaware of. I want to remind everyone that, in general, about 75% of what is said is in English and 25% of it is in French. So there is already an imbalance between the two languages.

If we had to hold a debate on the quality of the two languages in Canada, I think we could do it on so many things other than simple encouragement.

• (2010)

[English]

The Chair: I think maybe we could go back to the original word of “encourage” rather than “recommend”, to soften it a little bit.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madame Normandin, actually, in her remarks kind of gave me an idea.

Based on what you said, maybe we could just say, “increase awareness of the needs of interpreters”. That way we're moving away from anything that's constitutionally controversial and avoiding this, sort of sidestepping it, but also sticking with the spirit of what you're trying to achieve. That might be a way around this. It's just a thought.

The Chair: It's an interesting thought.

Is there any follow-up on that? How does everyone feel about “raising awareness”?

Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: If we only say that we want to bring the interpreters' well-being to the members' attention and that we are not talking specifically about the burden related to the fact that there are more comments in English to interpret toward French than the opposite, I think the proposal loses some of its meaning.

The question I put to the interpreter was very specific in that respect. Would this lighten the francophone interpreters' burden, as they are the most affected? That is what the interpreter also said. They are the ones with the most work to do and the biggest mental load. I think that we are taking away from the proposal's meaning if we simply say to pay attention to the interpreters.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

I didn't mean to say that we would just end it there. I meant that we would preface it with that and then include the rest of the recommendation. We would raise awareness about this particular concern that the interpreters have: too much of a load interpreting from English to French. We could say, "members are encouraged to..." I don't know if we should even say that. We could just inform all members and witnesses, before they speak, that this is a concern. I guess they could make a choice at that point.

Is that something that would be okay?

Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm still not comfortable. For me, any time you tell anyone that they should choose one language over another, I get a little concerned about that.

The Chair: How about eliminating that? They shouldn't choose anything. We're just going to make them aware of the fact that this is a concern and not recommend or ask them to do anything.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I would need to see the testimony again. I don't remember it being a concern. I just remember them talking about the need.... I would expect that, the way simultaneous interpretation happens in the House, they would hire accordingly.

Maybe it was there. I just honestly can't remember it. I think it's important to always encourage speaking both of the official languages. Of course, learning to speak French is something I'm slowly and painfully doing. Adult brains sometimes have a hard time.

It does concern me. I feel like it's a little bit beyond the scope of this committee to do that. I think it's a thoughtful conversation, but I'm not persuaded yet.

The Chair: Mr. Maloney is next, and then Mr. Richards.

Mr. James Maloney: Thanks, Chair.

I know I'm new to Parliament, having only been here for four and half years. During that period, I've chaired one of the standing committees. I don't recall a single occasion where we've directed or recommended to a witness what language to speak, or to any member of a committee. In fact, my practice was always to tell them that interpretation services were available and to speak the language of their choice.

• (2015)

The Chair: Okay.

We have Mr. Richards, then Mr. Duncan, and then maybe Madame Normandin can make a choice as to what amendment she's comfortable with. Then we could maybe put it to a vote or see how everybody feels at that point.

Mr. Alhabra, you have something to say as well. Okay.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Like Ms. Blaney, I continue to be concerned about us directing someone. You can call it whatever you want: encouraging them, recommending it, informing them. Call it whatever you want, but we're in some way going down a path where we are sort of directing someone as to what language they should choose to speak. I don't think that is appropriate. People should have the choice. We have two official languages. They're both equal. People should have the choice to speak whichever of those two languages they choose.

As for the suggestion that we remind people about this opportunity, I'm not even sure what that looks like. Before each person speaks, are we going to say, "By the way, did you know you can speak either English or French?" Then do we suggest that it might be better...? "It seems that you are a francophone, first of all, or an anglophone, first of all. May we suggest you speak in that language?"

I just don't see how this becomes anything besides awkward. People just have to make the choice about which language they speak, which language they're comfortable in. We have two official languages. They are both equal. People make that choice based on their preference.

The Chair: We have Mr. Duncan, and then Mr. Alhabra.

Mr. Eric Duncan: My only quick comment is that I sympathize with anything to help relieve the work of the interpreters. One of the things we haven't addressed here is the bidirectionality that they are having to do because of physical distancing in the interpretation booth. One thing that is not a recommendation in here officially but could be done is to expedite health and safety measures in the booth to get more staff there. That would probably be a major thing. If we could, we should get rid of the bidirectionality that interpreters are having to use to relieve the strain on them.

We're not addressing that. Again, I share the same feeling of being uncomfortable with the recommendations. I can just see a complaint, from one side or the other, coming from it.

Again, I certainly think there are other things we could do to help the interpreters.

The Chair: We'll hear from Mr. Alhabra, then Madam Normandin, and then we're going to have to try to figure out what we're going to do with this recommendation and move forward, seeing the time.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to say that our report has been focused on the idea of becoming virtual, and we'll be tackling issues that are a by-product of that. The point that Madame Normandin raises is much broader than that. I think it actually goes outside.... It's worthy of having a conversation on, about how we can pay attention to the distribution or the balance of language spoken, but I don't necessarily think the percentage changes because we're becoming more virtual or less virtual, so I'm not really sure about the relevance of that recommendation, at least to this report.

The Chair: Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Witnesses have told us that, owing to exceptional circumstances related to COVID-19, there is more pressure on interpreters from English to French. The impact on them is bigger.

Here is what I am wondering about. If witnesses talk about a specific situation in their opening remarks, and it cannot even be highlighted in a recommendation, what is the point of having them appear? If that situation cannot be brought to the attention of members and witnesses, what is the point of holding meetings or having those people testify?

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, Madame Normandin, maybe you have a final proposal for what this recommendation could look like, and then we could put it to a vote or see if there's agreement to adopt it.

● (2020)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Barnes, do all the sentences have to start with “recommends”?

Mr. Andre Barnes: Not necessarily. These are all recommendations. The sentence has to begin with “that”.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Okay. I suggest the following:

That the Committee bring to the attention of members that, during the COVID-19 situation, the burden of translation from English to French is heavier for francophone interpreters, which could be mitigated by witnesses and members opting to use French when possible.

[*English*]

The Chair: I was complimenting the good job that Madame Normandin had done in composing that and putting it all together, and then I saw everyone shaking their heads and thought you were not agreeing that she had done a good job. I'm glad that's not the case.

Is there agreement to adopt this recommendation as amended?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Chair: All right. Apparently—and this is one of the changes, as I mentioned before—at virtual committee sittings we won't be able to record this vote on division. We will have to go to a recorded vote in order to accurately capture the members' votes.

We will have a recorded vote on BQ 5 as amended.

Yes, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Just to avoid this circumstance in the future, because I don't want to waste time here, if in the future one of us has objections but sees that there's a will to move forward, could that person perhaps, rather than stating “on division”, just be given the floor quickly to say, “I don't support this, but I'll let it go ahead” or something like that, so we can avoid having to do recorded votes for a number of items? Would that alleviate this concern in the future?

The Clerk: If that's the will of the committee and the way they want to proceed, essentially it turns the decision into a kind of informal consensus to go forward. That would be fine.

The Chair: Okay. We have an informal consensus to move forward, I guess. Is that how you'd like it? Okay.

BQ 5 as amended is adopted.

NDP 6 was already adopted.

NDP 7 is very similar to—

The Chair: Yes. It's very similar to NDP 6. I think you added language in that which covers this now.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Madam Chair—

Hon. Omar Alhabra: I think we can just add the word “witness” to NDP 6, so that it's “any member or witness participating”.

The Chair: I think we already did.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Okay.

The Chair: Andre, did we not already add “witness”? Yes, I think we did. It takes care of NDP 7, so we can eliminate that. We've essentially combined NDP 6 and NDP 7.

Okay, we now have LIB 6 in section (e), which states, “Ensure all public hearings of the House of Commons should be made available through webcast and/or broadcasters, and strive for full accessibility.” It's very similar to what we've been doing so far in some of our committee hearings and COVID-19 hearings. Is everyone in agreement to adopt this one? Okay. LIB 6 is adopted.

NDP 5 has already been moved and adopted. It was moved up in the report.

We're moving along. We're on section (f) and LIB 7. The recommendation is on page 38 in the English version.

Here, I did find that LIB 7 and BQ 12 again have a lot of similarities. I don't know at this point. We could just adopt them individually and have redundancy. It's up to you guys. I'm just pointing it out.

Are there any comments on LIB 7?

Mr. Turnbull.

• (2025)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I agree that they look like they could be combined. I think BQ 12 covers a bit more than LIB 7. What I like about LIB 7 is the reference to the “requirements for usability, functionality, and security”. I would say that the only difference I see in them really is that one is more about the digital platform selection and the process for that, and the other one seems to be more about defining a “protocol” and “technical guidelines”.

Maybe they should be separate. I don't know. They overlap a bit, but it might be fine.

The Chair: They overlap, but it might be okay. Let's go with that.

Is there agreement to adopt LIB 7? It looks like there's mostly agreement. Okay. Seeing that there's no disagreement, LIB 7 is adopted.

BQ 6 states, “That the House of Commons provide technical support to interested parties to assist them in choosing a secure digital platform that they can use for their caucus meetings.” This one is particular to caucus meetings. Is everyone okay with adopting BQ 6? Okay. BQ 6 is adopted.

On BQ 12, I think essentially there was agreement before, so BQ 12 is adopted.

NDP 8 is very similar to BQ 6 as well, but this talks about in camera proceedings rather than caucus meetings, so this is different in that way. Is everyone okay with NDP 8?

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I get that we've already agreed on BQ 6, but I might suggest here that it might be better and it might flow a little easier in the report if we were to just add “caucuses” to this one. It reads really well, so we could say, “That the Clerk of the House of Commons ensure that all committees and caucuses have access”, etc., and then we just have to take out the second instance of “committee”, so it would just be “where meetings are not possible in person”.

We can capture caucuses and committees in the same way, rather than in two different recommendations. It's a little stronger that way. It's not just, “Well, make them work with the caucuses”, but a requirement. Caucus meetings are a pretty important function for all of us as members of Parliament. Rather than going with BQ 6 and NDP 8, we can just combine them by adding “caucuses” to this one.

The Chair: Justin, can we go back and make that change, then, for BQ 6? We could remove BQ 6, and then add “caucuses” after “committees”: “That the Clerk of the House of Commons ensure that all committees and...” Should we say “party caucuses”?

Mr. Blake Richards: Sure. If you want to say “party”, that's fine, too.

The Chair: So it would be, “all committees and party caucuses have access to a private, secure platform for meetings”.

Mr. Blake Richards: Again, it can read exactly as it is now, except for taking out “committee” in front of “meetings”—that would

obviously be caucus or committee—and saying, “where meetings are not possible in person”.

• (2030)

The Chair: Perfect. Done.

Andre, do you have that? All right. Is everyone okay with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. Essentially it covers both things. That's great. Great work.

All right, we're moving on to the health section.

This recommendation, LIB 8, reads pretty much exactly like the heading.

Andre, it's mimicking the heading. I don't know if you're still keeping the heading in that same format, but I was wondering if, after “parliamentary precinct”, you could add “and remotely”, so that it mirrors this.

I guess I'm getting ahead of myself. It would depend on whether this is adopted, really. Otherwise, it could be left with “precinct”. It was just a suggestion when I was reading it.

Yes, Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Hi, everyone.

I think this is a really key recommendation. The reason we're doing this is that this is a pandemic. I think our very first recommendation should be about protecting the health and safety of all involved. I think that should move right up to the beginning. This is a public health crisis. Our job is to ensure the health and safety of everyone who works in the precinct, who works remotely and in our communities.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: First of all, I agree with this recommendation. One of the things I wanted to bring forward, though, is that it's a recommendation with nothing we can measure. I'm just wondering if anybody else has concerns about that. Should we require, in a pandemic, maybe a monthly report, something that says how things are going or if there's anything we should be concerned about, as parliamentarians. I agree that it's important to look after the workers. I'm just wondering about the accountability measures, and wondering if anyone else was thinking the same thing.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Although I don't have any trouble passing it, I kind of had the same thought as Ms. Blaney. It reads like a typical Liberal platitude more than anything else: if there is any action that can be taken, or if there are any measurable results that can come of it. I think it's a pretty obvious statement, to say that everybody would like to prioritize the health and safety of people working within the precinct.

I'm not opposed to it, obviously, because it's something we all agree with. But it does read like a platitude, there's no question. There's really nothing that it delivers.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I want to echo the sentiments of my colleague Ms. Duncan. Moving this up to the top would certainly show its priority, but there's another recommendation much further down. It's at the very end of the report. It's one we made about having a pandemic and disaster plan. I believe it sort of fits in this section related to the health and safety of members, individuals, community members, etc. I wonder whether, if that were to be combined, it would seem less like—to quote Mr. Richards—a platitude, which I don't agree with. I think it would feel a bit more robust and substantial if we included that other recommendation in this section and moved it up to the top.

The Chair: What recommendation is that? What number, do you remember?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, I'll give you the number. I'm just scrolling through.

The Chair: Okay, it's LIB 14: “That the House create a Pandemic and Disaster Plan, that all Parliamentarians are aware of the plan, and that it is rehearsed and updated on a regular basis.”

You would like that recommendation to be combined with LIB 8.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: It's LIB 14.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It could be. That wasn't my initial suggestion, but I think that might be worth considering. I thought that LIB 8 was a stand-alone one. It is a little broad and general, but I think that having a more specific, tangible, measurable result, as Ms. Blaney was desiring, might be by adding LIB 14 to that section.

• (2035)

The Chair: Okay, so we would just move LIB 14 to right after LIB 8, so that you have a broad recommendation and then a more specific recommendation that comes right after it.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes. I mean, it's essentially just to provide the rationale. A pandemic and disaster plan would actually help to achieve this overall prioritization of the health and safety of both members and individuals working on the parliamentary precinct and remotely, but also others.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, I think you had something to say.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm okay with that. I do think that they can be merged, but that's just my opinion. I'm happy to hear from the rest of the committee on what they think.

I guess the one thing I'm thinking with regard to a pandemic and disaster plan is that I'm sure that there are contingency plans already in Parliament. I just don't want people to have two different plans. I don't know if there's a way to create a pandemic and disaster plan based on current contingency plans so that there aren't two different plans. I don't know if I'm making any sense, but I would assume that those things are already in place. I just don't want to add more burden, but I understand at the same time that there would have to be a specific methodology when this occurs. It's like an addition to their plans. I just want to recognize that.

Sorry. I know we're all getting tired.

The Chair: If they have a plan in place—I'm not sure, maybe they do—would they not already meet the recommendation's requirement? I don't know.

Madame Normandin was on the list to speak next, and then I think that's it. Then maybe we can resolve this.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: At initial reading, the recommendation may seem to be of little interest. However, the more I think about it and read it, the more I think it is actually important. It has been at the heart of all the debates we have held. The recommendation seeks to establish a balance between the health of parliamentarians, the health of people working on Parliament Hill and the respect of parliamentary privileges, including the privilege of coming to testify and taking a seat in Parliament. That has been the key issue in all of our debates.

Even if it was not combined with an accountability mechanism, I think it is important in itself, in a way. When we spend more time on it, we realize that it is anything but a platitude.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Perhaps we will look at adopting LIB 8 and LIB 14 and see if there's agreement on those. Then perhaps we'll discuss the other point that's been brought up about where this section goes if it's not to stay here.

Is there agreement on LIB 8? Okay, LIB 8 is adopted.

LIB 14 is going to be moved from the last section—whatever section that is—and brought up to section (g). Is there agreement on LIB 14?

There's a comment.

Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan: It's just a comment on that, and it builds on what Ms. Blaney said, too. I agree that it does sound right, and it's something we need to discuss. However, I think it might have been the clerk in one of our first meetings.... They were talking about some of the things that are already in place. I don't think a pandemic one is as detailed as those for war, natural disasters or some of those other things.

I agree with the sentiment and wholeheartedly agree that we should take a look at it, that we should keep it on our future to-do list. I think it's something that our committee might want to get some answers on, not just dealing with pandemics but dealing, heaven forbid, with some of those other things as well.

I agree with it. I like it in the future business, but at this point, 8:39 p.m., I'm not going to put up a big fight if it moves.

The Chair: Yes. Okay, I can see both points.

I think I saw agreement to adopt LIB 14 right before that comment. That is adopted.

Dr. Duncan, do you have a suggestion on where you would like to see it?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Chair, I feel this has to be right up front. The whole reason we are even doing this study is that we have a public health crisis. You have to be prepared for these things. I think it's important to have that pandemic plan and that disaster risk reduction plan as well.

Up at the front would be my suggestion.

● (2040)

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Blaney has a point. Then maybe, Andre, if you have any comments on that, you could let me know.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: It's just to clarify that you want it right under Guiding Principles, part (a), "Temporary nature of procedural changes".

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Can I jump in here for a second?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Based on a previous discussion with Ms. Duncan, I thought that moving this whole section up to the top with the same title, having it at the very beginning of the recommendations because it's.... I agree the first one is a very general recommendation. It's almost the key principle that grounds this entire study. I think it's so pivotal, it's almost like the keystone in an archway. That's the way I look at it. I would opt for putting it right up top. The whole section includes the analysts' overview of some of the testimony that was given by Dr. Raymond, if I remember correctly.

The Chair: So it would go under discussion and become the next A.i.(a). It would move "Temporary nature of procedural changes", and put this in place of that. Then would "Temporary nature of procedural changes" would come after that?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, everything would just move down, I think.

The Chair: Okay.

Andre, do you have any discussion on that?

Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, I want to say how much I appreciate Ms. Duncan saying how important it is to plan for a pandemic or other emergency. I really appreciate that comment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Andre, does that look good then?

Okay, we're on the "Quorum" section. We have LIB 9. That's the only recommendation in that section, thankfully.

Yes, Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, I think this is one of those recommendations that really fall outside the scope of this committee's mandate, and I've mentioned this a few times today. The scope of our mandate is to look at the COVID-19 crisis. When we look at this particular recommendation, it sets us on a path, and I don't think any of us, without further study and not knowing what the im-

plications are.... It really isn't within the purview of this committee to make this kind of recommendation.

I'll be voting against it, but I would strongly suggest that if this is not the will of the committee, we move this forward potentially into another study. I understand the testimony of Mr. Dufresne and the context on which this discussion was based, but we are talking about changing hundreds of years of parliamentary tradition. We all understand that Ottawa is the seat of Parliament, but we are literally, with this recommendation, suggesting to Parliament that some-how quorum will be constituted through my Wi-Fi box here at home and that if 20 members sign in by Wi-Fi, we are going to end up having a quorum. I think this is one of those recommendations that are really short-sighted, and I think we really need to understand the implications of this as it relates to the Constitution and the impact that this could have.

I won't be supporting this, and I'm actually going to move to strike this from the recommendations, because I think it way oversteps our boundaries in the context of this study. Beyond having an hour of testimony from Mr. Dufresne, I really think we need to look at this from a constitutional standpoint and gain a little more understanding and have, not better constitutional experts, but well-informed constitutional experts before we even think about putting a recommendation like this into this report for Parliament's consideration.

I will not be supporting this. I'm going to move to strike it from the report, frankly. I hope I can get some support on that. We can look at it at another time. This is not the time to be looking at such an important constitutional question.

The other thing I would suggest is that this really moves us down a path that I'm not comfortable with. I've stated several times today that this moves beyond the scope of a temporary emergency situation. The word "permanently" is inserted in this recommendation. I'm actually quite shocked that this is the type of recommendation that would come into this committee's study, Madam Chair.

I'm going to move that we strike this from the report and from the recommendations.

● (2045)

The Chair: Okay. There are some comments regarding what you have just suggested.

I have Mr. Turnbull, Ms. Blaney and then Mr. Alghabra.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I appreciate Mr. Brassard's comments and I totally respect his perspective on this, but I think I see it quite differently.

I would say the word "permanently" appears there because we quoted the recommendation that was made by the law clerk, Mr. Dufresne. If you look at our recommendation, it has that in quotes. It wasn't our intention to indicate that this would be a permanent change to quorum but that this would be a recommendation for a virtual presence to be considered within a pandemic or an exceptional circumstance like we are in.

The other thing is, I think it's a bit contentious around the "20 members", etc., because that may change. I have some suggested wording for a revised version of this recommendation that takes out the quote, but I have more to say about quorum in relation to the testimony we heard to back up why this recommendation appears here and how I don't think it's overstepping, based on the testimony that was given by three or four very reputable sources or experts on parliamentary procedure.

I want to give the revised version of it first, if you're okay with that. What I would recommend is that we state the recommendation as follows: "Consistent with the Law Clerk of the House of Commons: The Committee recommends that during extraordinary circumstances, virtual presence meets the requirements for quorum as set out in Section 48 of the Constitution Act of 1867."

The Chair: Could you repeat that, please, one more time, slowly?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I said it too fast. "Consistent with the Law Clerk of the House of Commons: The Committee recommends that during extraordinary..."

Sorry, I'm reading it too fast again. I'll start again. "Consistent with the Law Clerk of the House of Commons: The Committee recommends that during extraordinary circumstances, virtual presence"—

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Or whatever the word is. Is it "exceptional" or "extraordinary"? I don't know; Andre does.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Whatever we said before. I can't remember; we've used so many, but to stay consistent.... Maybe Andre could make it consistent.

A voice: "Exceptional".

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I think we said "exceptional", yes. My mistake. I'll continue: "exceptional circumstances, virtual presence meets the requirements for quorum as set out in section 48 of the Constitution Act of 1867."

• (2050)

The Chair: You're essentially taking out the quote from above, and then you're just adding the words to the second half: "Consistent with the Law Clerk of the House of Commons", gets added to the front of "The Committee recommends that during exceptional circumstances, virtual presence", and then you're scratching out the words "of 20 members". You're going to cut that out "virtual presence meets the requirements of quorum as set out in Section 48 of the Constitution Act of 1867."

Is that correct?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It's correct, yes.

It takes out the reference to "20 members" and takes out the reference to "a permanent change". Part of what I could see people reacting to—and I can understand why they would be concerned about that—is thinking this was now changing the way the House of Commons would operate in regular times or circumstances, and that was not the intention. It was really focused on those times of exceptional circumstances.

I think it's fairly consistent with how we've been operating to date. It's probably taking one step further in terms of having a virtual presence count as quorum. I think we need that in order to have formal proceedings.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney and then Mr. Alghabra.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for the change. I am still not comfortable. I feel that there was not enough. I hear that for you it felt like there was enough information. For me, I just feel that, in a virtual setting, there's just not enough. I need to know a little bit more. There are some questions that I have.

I just can't support it even with the change, and I just want to have that on the record.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I want to build on what Mr. Turnbull has just said.

I would like to suggest that the quote be moved to the body of the report. In fact, if I recall, Mr. Brassard suggested that we add a quote from Mr. O'Brien, who argued that there might be an issue of quorum. Perhaps we can add the quote, which is currently in bold in the recommendation of the law clerk, to the body of the report.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I still think there remains a question about the constitutionality of the idea that "presence" could mean virtual. I don't think a requirement to change the Standing Orders would be enough to necessarily effect this change. It may actually be unconstitutional as well.

Having said that, there's still a debate around the idea of virtual versus, maybe, hybrid sittings. I could make a suggestion for that last part. If it's accepted, great. If not, then I wouldn't be able to support it.

For the part after "extraordinary circumstances", we could change it to read, "hybrid sittings with at least 20 MPs present in the chamber meet the requirements for quorum", and then it would carry on as is from there. The difference would be that we're doing what we've done with the sittings we've had lately, where you have 20 people present and the rest could be virtual as long as we've met that quorum requirement. Then we don't have the issues with the Constitution, and so on.

The Chair: Okay. I've written that down. Thanks for that suggestion. We have two things floating.

Next we have Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Brassard and then Madam Normandin.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: To Mr. Richards' suggestion, although I understand it, I think this is basically the hybrid model. It's what we've already been doing.

The intention behind the recommendation is to echo the sentiments of Benoît Pelletier, Joseph Maingot, Philippe Dufresne and Greg Tardi, all of whom basically said in their testimony that—if I were to summarize all of it, the way I read it—the courts would not intervene.

Parliament has a constitutionally guaranteed right over its own domain, which means that it makes its own rules. Any time the courts have interpreted anything like this, they have consistently used the living tree approach, which means that they would adopt a modern interpretation that would essentially allow for a virtual presence.

Finally, the testimony suggests, based on my reading of it over and over again, that no changes are actually necessary. What I think Mr. Dufresne had said is that if we enshrine those changes in a piece of legislation or a change to the Standing Orders, this would make it clear that we were exercising that constitutionally protected right, which is control over our own proceedings as the House of Commons.

From my perspective, based on the testimony that we heard, this isn't a big stretch at all. It's actually, I think, the dominant perception that was shared by the most compelling testimony that we heard from reputable experts.

• (2055)

The Chair: Okay.

Next we have Mr. Brassard, Madam Normandin and then Mr. Duncan.

Mr. John Brassard: First of all, Madam Chair, I do seek clarification on my motion to strike this, whether we're still on that or not. I am moving a motion to strike it. I just need clarification on that.

The Chair: I think this debate is relevant to having this motion in the report or striking it. That's why I figured this goes to your motion to strike.

We will hear from the clerk as well, because I need some guidance on that issue. I figured I'd let you all speak first.

Mr. John Brassard: I think the guidance that needs to be followed or directed here is.... What this recommendation says is, "...a virtual presence of 20 members meeting the requirements of quorum as set out in Section 48 of the Constitution Act of 1867". Section 48 of the Constitution Act of 1867 says right now: "The presence of at least twenty members of the House of Commons shall be necessary to constitute a meeting of the House for the exercise of its powers...." It doesn't say "the virtual presence". It says "the presence".

Going back to what I said earlier, this.... I get it, Mr. Turnbull. We've had four people come in and talk about this, and I didn't get a sense from them that everybody was in agreement. I understand the living tree argument. I understand that Parliament is the master of its own domain and the seat of Parliament is in Ottawa. Those things are very clear to me, from what I heard, but what I need to better understand, and I think what we all need to better understand, is just how a virtual presence can meet the needs of section 48 of the Constitution Act. I don't think we, quite frankly, heard that consistently.

The hybrid model that we're effectively using now on Wednesdays, at least for the purposes of the committee, is very similar to the hybrid model Mr. Richards spoke of earlier. I would strongly encourage that this recommendation is beyond the scope of the mandate of this committee, which is to look at the current situation

of COVID-19 and to make recommendations to Parliament given the circumstances we are in today.

This fundamentally changes the way Parliament is to be going forward. I understand that we're talking about extraordinary circumstances going forward. I think we have to be very, very careful on this one. We are heading down a very slippery slope as it relates to the Constitution of this country and the fact that we are to sit in Ottawa. A physical presence means just that.

That's all I have to say, Madam Chair. I find it kind of curious that there's talk here about striking the quote of Mr. Dufresne up top, and perhaps moving it into the body. I don't recommend that we deal with this at all, and this is why my motion stands. The fact that this quote is somehow being administered to change the Constitution to reflect a virtual presence is curious to me, to say the least. I think we need to strike this and I hope members see that as well.

Thank you.

• (2100)

The Chair: Madam Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think we agree in saying that, regardless of what we write in the report, it will not tie the Supreme Court's hands. The Supreme Court could decide that the virtual presence of 20 people is constitutional or that it is not. No one has a crystal ball. My understanding of the recommendation is that we feel that the virtual presence of 20 people in the House is sufficient, given the testimony we have heard, to open the House and continue our daily work.

I understand that this recommendation is not intended to tie the Supreme Court's hands. It is intended to help us operate with 20 people virtually because we feel sufficiently comfortable with the testimony we have heard to say that, in our opinion, this will likely not be overturned by the Supreme Court.

I don't think this recommendation has any other uses than to allow us to manage our own affairs.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Normandin.

The next speaker is Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Madam Chair, just to build on the comments.... I'm a stickler, obviously, and I think you could tell from my passion for a hybrid system.

I just want to comment on Mr. Turnbull's comments about a hybrid model. I think he suggested that we have that right now, that some of our sittings are virtual and we have, on Wednesdays, a presence in the chamber. I'll clarify that. That's not what a hybrid model is, or what has been talked about in the next section that way. When it goes back to quorum, a lot of these issues, including the next section, get back into the legalities of quorum. I think it can easily be resolved through this hybrid model of being very, very safe, having a minimal, safe number of members in the House and those being able to participate.

When we talk about a hybrid, I think it's important to understand the U.K. context versus what we have now. It's not a hybrid model. We're not set up in full, and those types of things.

I just want to leave it at that and chime in what I could on that item.

The Chair: Justin, you're still with us, right?

Yes, Mr. Nater, I see you, and Mr. Alghabra, I see you too. You guys will be next.

Justin, please, on the point of moving to strike the whole recommendation as is.

The Clerk: Yes, Madam Chair.

As of right now, all of these recommendations that the members are looking at are suggestions until such time as they decide to put them into the report. The recommendation that the committee is considering right now is merely a suggestion. It's not, formally speaking, part of the report, so there's nothing, per se, to strike.

The way to address it, obviously, if the committee didn't want to see this suggested recommendation in the report, would be to simply decide not to have it in the report, which could be done through the consent of the committee or, if it came to it, a recorded vote. If the committee voted in a recorded vote not to have it included, it wouldn't be included. That would be the main way for it not to appear in the report.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Nater, for comments on this, and then Mr. Alghabra. Then we'll see if we can move to the procedural part of this.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Chair, I appreciate your giving me the opportunity to have the floor. Considering that I'm not a member of this committee, I do appreciate having a few very brief moments to comment on this.

I just think that whenever we're looking at the Constitution and we're looking at effectively making an amendment to the Constitution, it requires more than a few committee meetings to undertake that.

I recognize there has been some testimony before this committee that suggests it would be adequate to infer virtual presence as meeting the requirement of the Constitution. I would, however, caution that the Australian constitution has a very, very similar phrase as we have in our Constitution and the clerk of their house of commons has indicated clearly that their interpretation would require the physical presence within the chamber to constitute quorum.

If we're looking at our Commonwealth cousins, Australia is a good example, with very similar wording in their constitution. Granted, we have had slightly different histories over the past 100-odd years in both our contexts, with their constitution being implemented in 1900. That said, if we're looking at interpretations, it's a pretty good comparator.

It would be important to take a pause with this. Going ahead with this interpretation is taking a massive step, and I would caution against it. Granted, I'm not a member of this committee, and I have no voting authority on this committee. I would just suggest that would be an important indicator to be looked at before we make a change to our Constitution.

Thank you for your indulgence, Madam Chair.

• (2105)

The Chair: Yes. Are you subbing in for somebody today or going to be?

Mr. John Nater: I'm just here for the pure enjoyment of this committee.

The Chair: Okay. That's what I was thinking. I could see that all the other members are still here, but you do have a lot of procedural knowledge, so thank you for that comment.

Mr. Alghabra, and then maybe we can [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Madam Chair, I'm going to try again to make a proposal here to avoid any confusion that the way this recommendation is worded may be causing. Since we've already adopted recommendation number one, which calls on the House to establish a new set of standing orders to be adopted under exceptional circumstances, I think one can conclude that the new set of standing orders would also cover the idea of quorum. I would be comfortable in referring to that recommendation again here in this section, just to highlight that, hopefully, the exceptional standing orders would take the issue of quorum into account.

The Chair: Are you proposing a further amendment?

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I'm proposing a replacement of LIB 9 and basically removing LIB 9. I still think it would be useful to keep the quote in the body of the text, because that quote has come to us from an objective witness, but also to then completely remove the rest of LIB 9 and just refer to recommendation number one, maybe just putting it back exactly as it was worded at the beginning.

The Chair: Do you want recommendation one to mention quorum now? Quorum wasn't mentioned in recommendation one.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: We can, sure, but we don't have to; honestly, we don't. I feel that the new set of standing orders will have to take that into account.

The Chair: Okay.

Do you want to vote on the proposed amended recommendation, as I guess Mr. Turnbull proposed? You're just stating what Mr. Brassard was stating. I think we'd need to have a vote to really eliminate it.

You can vote and you can all eliminate it, if you want to eliminate it, or have consensus, or however you want to go about it.

If you would like to see it stricken, then we can take it out by not adopting it, if that's what you're saying, Mr. Alghabra.

I do see a few more hands up: Ms. Petitpas Taylor, Mr. Brassard and Mr. Turnbull.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor has given up her spot.

Mr. Brassard, go ahead, and then Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, if I'm hearing Mr. Alghabra properly, he's suggesting that we strike recommendation LIB 9. He's referring back to the first recommendation that was adopted, which I voted against, by the way.

I mean, if it's his intent to strike the motion, then that was clearly my intent, and I would agree with that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Turnbull, and then I guess we could vote on it or just have consensus. If nobody wants it, that's fine; our problem is over and we can move forward.

Mr. Turnbull.

• (2110)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I just want to clarify, Madam Chair, based on one of the other comments made, that we're not talking about an amendment to the Constitution here. This interpretation of quorum is consistent with the given testimony from, by my count, five reputable sources of expertise on parliamentary procedure and the Constitution. I have a whole bunch of quotes here. I don't want to go through them all, but I really do think that this interpretation in fact is something that we're already employing. In this meeting of this standing committee, we're already operating virtually and counting virtual presence as quorum. We're voting on motions. We're doing all kinds of work in committee business. In a sense, then, it's already implied in the way we're proceeding currently.

Again, I don't think this is a big stretch. It does not require an amendment to the Constitution. Mr. Dufresne was very clear about that. Mr. Greg Tardi was very clear about that. All of them said that the courts would not intervene, and that in fact even if the courts ever did intervene, they would tend to side, in the vast majority of cases, with the living tree approach, where they would likely interpret the specific wording around quorum to include "virtual presence".

I think this is merely a recommendation that echoes the comments given in testimony. It's not a stretch. Australia, as an example, was the least progressive example in our briefing notes. There are many, many other examples of where parliaments, I think around the world, are operating this way.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm hoping we can keep this brief.

We have Mr. Maloney, Dr. Duncan, and then Mr. Richards.

Mr. James Maloney: Chair, the Constitution says 20 is quorum. I don't think anybody is taking issue with that. The first amendment we made today was to agree to conduct a virtual Parliament. Who agreed with that and who disagreed with that at this point is sort of irrelevant.

Therefore, automatically incorporated by reference is the 20-person rule. If we're going to have a virtual Parliament, we have to abide by the Constitution, so 20 is quorum. I think we're having a conversation about nothing, frankly.

Perhaps to address Mr. Brassard's concern and Mr. Alghabra's concern, why don't we take this out as a recommendation, incorporate the quote into the body of the report, reference it as evidence, and move on?

The Chair: Is that okay with everyone? I'm getting mixed messages. I would love to do whatever you guys like so we can get going, whether it's adopt, remove, whatever.

Dr. Duncan, maybe you could help out, and then we could get some understanding.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Chair, I'll keep my intervention very short.

I'd like to recognize your work and the work of the analysts and the clerk. This is not easy, and I want to say thank you to you all.

This is an extreme circumstance. If the House has to go virtual, it will be with the agreement of all the House leaders and quorum would have to be virtual.

The Chair: I still don't understand if we have agreement to remove this and move on, or whether we're going to need a vote or agreement on it. Some are saying no and some are.... I don't understand at this point.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: The suggestion Mr. Maloney made could possibly satisfy everybody here. I remain concerned. I know that Mr. Turnbull indicated he doesn't think it's unconstitutional.

Certainly an argument to the contrary exists out there. In fact, Mr. Dufresne himself even indicated, and this is quoting him, "It's possible that a court could disagree", and "what was adopted in the impugned proceeding could be invalidated." There is a body out there that would feel that. A debate still goes on about that, the idea that a physical presence in the House would be required. That's why I made my suggestion.

However, it sounds to me that a lot of people may feel we shouldn't move forward with this. I would certainly agree because we did hear that testimony. I would be fine with the idea of adopting this quote. We should probably add the balance, this additional quote I've just indicated from Dufresne. Either way that would let us move on here. I think that might be a wise decision.

• (2115)

The Chair: We'll hear from the analysts, but it seems we're starting to get some consensus around moving the quote into the body of the paragraph so it's addressed, but having no recommendation in this section. That is okay.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor is next on the list and then Ms. Normandin. Maybe we can hear from the analysts quickly before that. It may have an effect on what we say.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair—

The Chair: Yes, Andre and then Madam Petitpas Taylor.

Mr. Andre Barnes: I'll be very brief. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Yesterday the committee asked me to fill in the hole I had left by moving the part about the living tree. Essentially, the quote is already there. I summarized Mr. Dufresne's testimony. It also includes Mr. Richards' quote that he gave recently about whether a court could potentially find differently from what was being suggested. That is already in version three, which, unfortunately, members haven't seen.

The Chair: Okay. That's great.

Ginette.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair, I suggest this. I don't feel we have consensus when I'm looking at everyone on the screen right now. I would recommend a vote on this, then from there we'll be able to move forward.

The Chair: Okay.

Madam Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I agree with that. I don't think we could simply remove this recommendation, as we would not know whether we can use a Parliament that is 100% virtual. If we do not look into this recommendation now and if it is not in our report, we won't know whether we think that the House can operate and whether the Speaker is allowed to open the House if there are only 20 people online.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. I like Ms. Petitpas Taylor's recommendation to get through this. I'm having a hard time getting consensus. I know I've been told that if we don't want the recommendation, we don't even have to vote on it. However, it's unclear whether we want it or not, so I think that procedurally, it will be more appropriate to have a vote and understand everyone's wishes in the end.

Justin, could you help us with a recorded vote on this?

Yes, Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Just to be clear, precisely what are we voting on? Are we voting to remove the paragraph?

The Chair: No, we are voting on having this recommendation in the report. That's what the vote is going to be on. It's going to be the amended recommendation, of course.

The amended recommendation looks this way. It will not include the quote that is in the first part of the recommendation. It will be

as follows: "Consistent with the Law Clerk of the House of Commons: The Committee recommends that during exceptional circumstances, virtual presence meets the requirements for quorum as set out in Section 48 of the Constitution Act of 1867."

We are voting on whether or not that gets into the report.

Justin, could you help us with that? Thank you.

The Clerk: Okay.

The vote is on a modified recommendation LIB 9.

Mr. Blake Richards: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I had proposed an amendment to that motion. If we're going to vote on it, should we not also vote on the amendment first?

The Chair: Sorry. Remind me. You wanted to add.... Oh, yes, the hybrid sitting. You wanted to remove "virtual" and replace it with "hybrid sitting with at least 20 members". Is that right?

• (2120)

Mr. Blake Richards: I would be striking the words "virtual presence of 20 members" and replacing them with "hybrid sittings with at least 20 MPs present in the chamber".

The Chair: Okay.

We could have a recorded vote on that. We'll vote first on the amended amendment, so the amendment with Mr. Richards' amendment that has been proposed.

Justin, can you help us through that?

The Clerk: The vote is on the subamendment by Mr. Richards.

The Chair: That's a better word for it, subamendment. I'm losing my vocabulary at this point.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 7, yeas 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Okay. Now we're back to the suggested recommendation LIB 9, as amended.

(Text of recommendation as modified agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We're almost done, guys.

I'm just trying to encourage you. We do have a little bit more, but it's encouraging.

We are on LIB 10 regarding "Hybrid model for sittings of the House".

Mr. Duncan and Mr. Brassard.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I'll let Mr. Brassard go first. I have to find my note that I wrote on this.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I'm just going back and forth.

When we read the recommendation, "acknowledge that virtual sittings of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic have been successful and 300-plus MPs", I think we're really making a presumption here. There are several accounts of the fact that the virtual proceedings have not gone well despite the fact that we may think so. There are members who have not been able to access some of these committee meetings whether it's a bad connection, lack of rural broadband or lack of connectivity.

The fact that we're somehow championing this as successful, for me, and from what I've seen and heard from several colleagues at least, it's still a work in progress. We heard again from one of the NDP members from Nunavut that she would have virtual connection difficulties. I think we're making a very strong presumption acknowledging, as the word says, that virtual sittings have been "successful" despite what we've been hearing from several members.

I will not be supporting this as a recommendation, and I'm going to ask that a recorded vote be taken on this.

Thank you.

• (2125)

The Chair: Mr. Duncan and then Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I think the work that Andre has done in terms of building that section has been very well done. I think it talks about some of our witness testimony, about how the hybrid model could actually address a lot of the potential legal challenges of an interpretation of how a hybrid model could work.

Again, I'm not in favour of LIB 10, and I just think, again, it speaks to the narrative or the tone of the report that completely puts a hybrid model to the side. It goes through, again, the witness testimony, how this model could be done safely, how it could work and those types of things.

To go back and have the recommendation be that we just add virtual proceedings without any sort of acknowledgement that a hybrid model can address some of the legal questions or testimony we've heard and the opportunities to help us return back in a safe timeline and manner whenever that may be.... I just don't think the recommendation is acknowledging what's in that section of the report.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's a good point.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I'll be brief.

I'd like to make a very small amendment to this recommendation because I realize it doesn't reference during the current pandemic, which I think it really should. It's a concern I have. I think we've heard other members' consistent concerns in that regard, and I want to be mindful of that.

In the second sentence of this particular recommendation, I believe it should say, "during the current pandemic". I can say where I feel that should be inserted, and I'll read the sentence: "Given the success of current virtual proceedings, this Committee recommends that we move to additional virtual proceedings during the current pandemic for all regular business of the House of Commons." That's what I would recommend. I think it's important.

To respond to my colleagues' concerns, I do feel we should be acknowledging the incredible amount of progress we've made in an incredibly short period of time. It really feels to me like the House of Commons administration has implemented virtual proceedings so quickly and worked so hard and there's been nothing but, as far as I can tell, very minor frustrations from a relatively few MPs I've heard from. That's been my experience and I certainly feel grateful for all of that work.

This is paying tribute to all of that effort that's gone in. I feel strongly that we need to do that in this report, because otherwise I don't think we're really doing justice to that hard work that's been put in.

The Chair: As a reminder to everyone, continue to keep your headphones on so the translators can hear you clearly. I get feedback that things are starting to go a little south and people are not using their mikes.

Mr. John Brassard: I'm sorry, Madam Chair, but my headphones are not working on the computer that I'm using. They were working when I was in my office earlier, but they're not working now. I apologize to the interpreters for that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: One of the concerns I have with this recommendation is that it's under the section that talks about a hybrid model for sittings and nowhere in the recommendations do we have anything about hybrid sittings. I'm sorry that I don't have a recommendation. Quite honestly, I think we need to do something about this and make sure there is some more study. I don't know if we want to propose that as something to do in the future, but to have nothing.... It's all about the virtual proceedings. I need a bit of help. I can't support this unless we find a way....

I agree that we've had some good experiences and some not-so-good experiences. I couldn't agree more with Mr. Turnbull, who earlier talked about the amazing work and effort and how quickly we've moved. The people who work for the House of Commons need to be praised enormously for their amount of rigour and for how quickly they've done things to change, but this is a sticking point for me. I need a bit of help as to how we can include a recommendation about hybrid sittings.

• (2130)

The Chair: Maybe Mr. Alghabra will come up with a great suggestion here.

Mr. Alghabra, you're next, and then Madam Normandin.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

It seems to me that LIB 2 talks about a hybrid Parliament. Am I wrong? We adopted it properly this afternoon.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, it's just not in this section. Maybe that's a recommendation Mr. Alghabra is going to make.

We'll hear from Mr. Alghabra, and then, Madam Normandin, if you have something further to say, you can speak to that as well.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That's not the recommendation I was going to make. I was going to elaborate on what this recommendation means.

Let's not forget that the hybrid model is a spectrum. It's a wide spectrum, and we are at the lower edge of that hybrid right now. In fact, other than regular committees and a special committee of the whole, nothing else has been virtualized. We are at the tip end of the hybrid model, and this recommendation is basically saying what even Ms. Blaney had suggested in one of her recommendations: It's incremental progress. What it recommends is to “move to additional virtual proceedings”. We will still remain within the hybrid model as we add more proceedings into a virtual world.

I hope that clarifies what this recommendation intends to do.

The Chair: Madam Normandin, would you like to speak to this now? No? Okay.

The only substantial revision or amendment that's been made to this recommendation is that “during this pandemic” has been added.

Is there agreement to adopt this recommendation, as amended with that language?

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: With the modified principle we're using instead of “on division”, we can do that.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair, I would prefer to have a recorded vote, please.

The Chair: A recorded vote has been requested.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Is that a recorded vote on the amendment to add the one line? I'm asking for clarification. I want to know what I'm voting for.

The Chair: You're going to be voting on recommendation LIB 10, as amended, with the wording “during this pandemic”.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, it was “during the current pandemic”.

The Chair: Okay.

Do you have that, Andre? It's “current” pandemic.

(Text of recommendation as modified agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

• (2135)

Mr. Blake Richards: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I just want to clarify that. Because we were planning to do the “on division” thing and there was a call for a recorded vote, it didn't give me an opportunity to clarify that.

The recommendation indicated additional proceedings, but they were virtual, of course, and the feeling that I have and I know other members have is that we should be doing something that allows people to be physically present as well with a hybrid type of proceeding. It's not the idea of extra proceedings that we object to—because we think there should be more sittings of the House right now—but it's the fact that it's being proposed and prescribed as virtual. It's also indicating that it's been successful and we certainly haven't had enough to be able to justify indicating that at this point. I just want to make that clear.

The Chair: Thank you. That's noted and on the record.

Next is BQ 7 on “Alternate locations”. BQ 7 is basically recommending that we not have in-house sittings in locations other than Parliament Hill in Ottawa unless they are approved by the Public Health Agency of Canada to protect the health and safety of all members, staff, administrative employees, security and interpreters.

Is there agreement to approve?

That's adopted.

Mr. Brassard, sorry. I thought you were putting your hand up in agreement.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, the concern I have with this—and I understand Dr. Raymond's testimony—is that when she was questioned about the pandemic—and I recall this, because I was the one who opened up this line of questioning—we were talking about whether social distancing measures would work, given the option of different venues and against the backdrop of the fact that, after the fire, everything moved down to the Victoria museum. We were investigating the fact that there were options that were available to Parliament to look at different venues.

In the line of questioning, Dr. Raymond spoke about not necessarily the public health issues, but familiarity issues with where the washrooms were, where people—presumably members of Parliament and staff—weren't in familiar surroundings. That's not up to the Public Health Agency to determine. That's up to the House administration to determine if there are other venues we could use in order to have a full Parliament.

I find that very curious, unless those locations have to be inspected and approved by the Public Health Agency of Canada, which again doesn't determine where we are going to be. That would be the House administration.

If we were dealing with the issue of social distancing and whether those measures in other venues were compatible with, or if they actually followed, Public Health Agency guidelines, similar to what they do now when we hold our in-House sessions every Wednesday.... In fact I think it was acknowledged clearly by Dr. Raymond, as well as by the Speaker and the Clerk, that we were following the guidelines. I don't think it's up to the Public Health Agency to decide whether we are, in fact, going to use another venue. That would be up to administrative staff. Certainly not for the reason of familiarity, it would be a public health issue.

I really find it curious in this recommendation that there is a suggestion that the Public Health Agency would dictate or determine whether, in fact, other venues are compatible with members of Parliament sitting in them. I don't know what sort of resolution we can come to on this, but I don't think the Public Health Agency is in a position to determine whether we should be using other venues.

The Chair: Mr. Richards will speak, and then Madam Normandin.

Mr. Blake Richards: I can forgo. I just wanted to make sure that it didn't appear that it was unanimously supported. I'm okay with letting my spot go.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I will be brief, Madam Chair.

I think it is somewhat reductionist to say that Dr. Raymond, during her testimony, talked only about the fact that members must be very familiar with a new venue. She also mentioned that the venue must be disinfected overnight by skilled teams. She raised a number of factors in her testimony, not only the fact that members must be very familiar with the chosen venue.

• (2140)

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there agreement to adopt this recommendation, or should we have a vote?

Mr. Eric Duncan: Can I just make a point? I'm sorry, Madam Chair, to belabour this.

The Chair: Yes, I just saw your hand come up now.

Mr. Eric Duncan: It's six and a half hours in, I know.

Again, I think there was a majority there.

I just think, from what Dr. Raymond said—and I respect her and appreciate all that she's doing in the Public Health Agency of Canada—but I think she specifically said that day, the agency is not in a position to approve locations. It sets guidelines. It sets those measures, and then it would be the House administration...it would be theirs. I just don't actually think she or the Public Health Agency can give an approval.

I'm not opposed to saying we listen to what they're saying about all the different precautions and measures; don't get me wrong. I just don't think there is an actual approval process by the Public Health Agency of Canada to give the House of Commons an okay on one person, on one thousand people or whatever it is. I think

we're asking something of a parliamentary committee that is not possible to adopt, even in the House of Commons.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on that?

Mr. John Brassard: I'm going to call for a recorded vote on that, Madam Chair.

The Chair: We'll have a recorded vote, Justin.

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

The Chair: Next, LIB 11, in the decorum section, talks about maintaining “the authority and dignity of Parliament including all matters relating to decorum in the House”.

There are some guidelines that have been listed underneath that, Andre.

We'll go to Mr. Turnbull, and then Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I just wanted to make a quick suggestion here. BQ 9 refers to having a neutral background or sign symbolizing Parliament that's set behind us in these virtual types of proceedings, which I think would address some of the concerns that were expressed by the Speaker.

In the LIB 11 suggestion, there are a bunch of bullet points. If this were something that Madam Normandin would support, I would recommend taking out “neutral background” and including the language of BQ 9, which refers to a “uniform” virtual background. Instead of a “neutral background”, we could use that language and maybe combine those and vote on all of them.

The Chair: LIB 11 has bullet points, and the suggestion has been made to make an amendment to incorporate the essence of BQ 9 and “neutral background” into one of the bullet points. Is that what you stated, Ryan?

Andre, are you able to incorporate what Madam Normandin has suggested into that?

Mr. Andre Barnes: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. This is amended and BQ 9 will no longer exist as a suggestion and will be incorporated into LIB 11. Is there agreement to adopt LIB-11 as amended?

Madam Normandin.

• (2145)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: We could remove the fifth point, which concerns the microphone and the headset, as that has already been mentioned elsewhere.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is that okay with everyone?

Ms. Blaney, you have a point as well.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I have a lot of questions about these, actually.

First of all, I'm a little confused. When I read this recommendation, I started to feel confused. Are we talking about COVI as a committee or are we talking about a virtual Parliament? Because if we are in a virtual Parliament, the rules of the House would continue, from what I understand, and the rules outline most of these issues, so I feel a bit confused about what we're talking about.

Another thing I saw, both in LIB 11 and in BQ 9, is that I want to understand if this commits the House of Commons to something. What I mean by that is, if we're going to have a uniform sign that is behind every member, is that a task that we're giving Parliament? We're talking about things like adequate lighting. Again, when we put these things in there, I get confused about what tasks we're actually adding to the House. I don't want somebody to be coming to Campbell River to figure out my lighting. I just want us to note that.

To go back to my original issue, are we talking about a committee or are talking about actually having a virtual Parliament. If it's a hybrid or a virtual Parliament, I feel a bit confused about that.

The Chair: I don't think we bind the House of Commons to anything, really, by submitting a report and making recommendations, but maybe the clerk can help us with that, as he did have his hand up to clarify how this is worded.

Yes, Andre.

Mr. Andre Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just for clarity, LIB 11 was only the first line. Where the parentheses begin, I added, after the words "for the Committee's consideration", some information because the committee received a letter from the Speaker asking for guidelines that would be included in this report.

To be quite honest, I made them all up. The first three come from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. The Speaker himself mentioned prohibiting the use of displays, props and exhibits, and encouraging the use of a headset with a microphone. I just made up the bullet point on adequate lighting because it would help to be able to see. If someone turned off the light in the room, could the Speaker recognize them? This is just my fatigue talking, but I thought of crazier ideas, like a member shouldn't be able to lie down and take the floor.

Feel free to take or leave any of them, and I would also mention that "cameras should be in a fixed position" comes from the procedure and House affairs guidelines for media showing up at committee meetings, because it wouldn't make sense for a member to walk around the room with a camera.

The Chair: In terms of what binds the House, I was also going to say that some are prescriptive and some not so prescriptive, so they could figure out lighting and how to consult on lighting without having to physically come, I'm sure. Our sound is consulted on without anyone having to physically come.

Clerk, do you have any comments on that?

The Clerk: Whatever the committee decides to put into the report in terms of recommendations, they are just recommendations. However, once a report is presented to the House, the House is always able to concur in that report. If the House does concur in it,

which means essentially that the House is adopting the report, the recommendations in it become orders of the House. It does imply that there's a certain amount of binding, if you will, because the recommendations become an element that the House and its administration will be required to implement in some way or fashion.

I'm not sure if that necessarily extends to sending people all the way to Campbell River to check on lighting. They would obviously interpret that, but it does bind the House in some ways. If the House chooses to concur in the report, these become more than mere suggestions or recommendations. If it doesn't choose to concur in the report, that's all these will ever be, recommendations, free to be taken or left.

• (2150)

The Chair: Maybe you can elaborate on what it means to have the House concur.

The Clerk: To concur is just that. It essentially means that the House is ordering that something be done. Depending on the wording of the recommendations in the report and if the House concurs in the report, it will become the express intent of the House that the action be taken or the recommendation be implemented.

The Chair: LIB 11, as amended, is to remove one of the bullet points mentioning headsets and microphones and then to include the suggestions made in BQ 9. Those are the amendments, essentially. Do we have agreement to adopt?

Some hon. members: Agreed

The Chair: Thank you. Next is BQ 8.

Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Again, I was just wondering about this. I assume that the Clerk of the House already works closely with the Speaker during regular Parliament, but I don't actually remember any testimony on this specifically. I'm just wondering if I could get some information about where this recommendation came from.

Mr. Blake Richards: I just want to make it clear that I'm opposed to this particular recommendation. When we're talking about the proceedings of the House of Commons, we're talking about debate in the House of Commons and who moderates debate in it. That should be done by parliamentarians. It should be done by those who were elected. I would oppose anything else, so I certainly can't support this.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: The idea is mainly to help the chair, who does have a number of things to do manually during virtual meetings. The clerk could help her note the speaking order. The goal is not so much for the clerk to take care of that, but to help out the chair. Perhaps the recommendation could have been worded differently. I am not hell-bent on it. It was simply meant to lessen the chair's burden, so that she could focus on the main aspects of her work.

[English]

The Chair: Since you don't need this recommendation to go forward—you've now led me to ask you—would you be willing to withdraw the recommendation?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I am prepared to withdraw it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, that is no longer a part of the report.

We'll move on to "(e) Voting". We have two recommendations for this section: LIB 12 and BQ 3.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, thank you.

I would suggest that BQ 3 is a much stronger recommendation that, I think, covers the sentiments of LIB 12 much better. I would suggest that we remove LIB 12 and go with BQ 3 as the recommendation in this section.

The Chair: Okay. I love it. We're removing our suggestions and making it easier.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: On that point, could I also just, at the end of "threatening their safety and/or that of their families", add "and communities", if that's okay with Madam Normandin and everyone?

Thank you.

● (2155)

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion on BQ 3 as amended with "and communities" at the end?

Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: No, I'm not going to support this one. I'm happy to have a vote, but I just feel that this should be something that is set later in the report as something for us to actually study further. We did hear from some people that they were exploring virtual voting, online voting, electronic voting—there was a lot of terminology—but I feel that we did not get to the core things that we should know about security, about how to make sure that a member is represented, etc.

The other thing is that there is nothing in here that talks about the other options. There was block voting. There was proxy voting. There was a whole range, and I don't feel that we fully studied them.

I would recommend to this committee that we do a study on this quickly, but we are not in a place where we can recommend a particular type of voting.

The Chair: Okay.

We have Mr. Richards, Mr. Duncan and then Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Blake Richards: Ms. Blaney actually put it quite well. I won't repeat all of it, but I will simply agree that we didn't have nearly the study of this that would be required to make a change of this magnitude. In fact, there was very little to almost no discussion about it.

We've heard over and over again from a number of members, particularly the government members, that it's something we

shouldn't be doing: bringing forward things that we didn't have time to discuss. We certainly didn't do that, and this is a major change to our way of doing business. We should not be making it without a proper study and hearing proper evidence on it.

That has not happened, so I certainly can't support this.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Duncan and then Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Make that three of us with this comment. Again, I am in favour of studying this more. It was very broadly discussed, and I had some other potential witnesses reach out after hearing some of our conversations.

Again, I take note of what the Speaker said. I know he gave some updates. To be honest, I haven't read through all the correspondence from the Speaker and some of the confidential documents.

We need to have a further conversation on this. I am not opposed to looking at it further, looking at options, but I just think that for the amount of time we spent and what our witnesses said, there was nowhere near comfort on enabling or supporting the set-up of an electronic voting system.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Turnbull and then Madam Normandin.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to point out some evidence that was given to us that I think is really important to keep in mind when understanding this recommendation in the context of our study.

We had a report from the procedure committee—I have it here—from the Right Honourable Karen Bradley, the chair of a committee of the House of Commons of the U.K. Parliament in London. She wrote to this committee and gave us some really substantial information I would point members to. It gives an overview of the MemberHub platform. I don't see this information reflected in our current report, but I think this section, given the recommendation, is really substantiated by the U.K. Parliament and how quickly it moved to implement an electronic remote voting procedure.

What's interesting about the things that I think are really relevant is that Karen Bradley is quoted in that letter. I would recommend that this quote appear in our report. She said, "The Committee is satisfied with the assurances it has been given about the security of the system."

Also, I did a bunch of Google searching—

Mr. John Brassard: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I wasn't finished, Madam Chair.

The Chair: A point of order has been raised, so hold your thought right there.

Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you.

Madam Chair, can Mr. Turnbull confirm whether that letter was actually sent to this committee or to the Speaker of the U.K. Parliament? Is it addressed to this committee?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I believe it was sent to the committee by the clerk.

Mr. John Brassard: Who was it written to?

• (2200)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It says “Mr. Speaker” on it—from the House of Commons.

Mr. John Brassard: Maybe we can get some clarification from Mr. Vaive.

The Clerk: Yes, Mr. Brassard. That information came from the witness we had from Westminster, Mr. Matthew Hamlyn. He committed to provide some follow-up information back to the committee. The piece of correspondence Mr. Turnbull is referring to was one of the pieces of material Mr. Hamlyn sent back to the committee to share with the members of PROC after he appeared.

Mr. John Brassard: I'm curious. Was it sent to the Speaker of the U.K. House of Commons or to the Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons? I think Mr. Turnbull referred to our House of Commons—I could be corrected on that—and that this letter came to our Speaker. In fact, my understanding is it went to the U.K. Speaker.

The Clerk: My recollection is that the letter Mr. Turnbull is referring to comes from the chair of the British House of Commons procedure committee and it was written to the Speaker of the British House of Commons, not to our Speaker.

Mr. John Brassard: I think Mr. Turnbull should have clarified that in his remarks. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks, Mr. Brassard. I appreciate that intervention.

I think it was Mr. Richards who had a very long list of supplementary information that your party requested from many of the witnesses and was very adamant about collecting that information, and that is exactly when I received this. It is relevant information to this study, and it outlines the numerous tests that were done and evaluations of those tests. It speaks to many of the security and integrity concerns that are really relevant to addressing some of the concerns that have been brought forward by members of this committee. I believe it's relevant for this study. It should be referenced in the report. I feel strongly that it supports the recommendation in this section, and I want to go a little further here and give you a couple of other quotes.

There's a quote that says, “The integrity of the remote system depends on the care taken by each individual Member over authentication.”

There is another section that says, “Members have a personal responsibility to ensure the integrity of the system. It is highly likely that any action by a Member which led to an unauthorised person casting a vote in a division would constitute a contempt of the House and a breach of the Code of Conduct, and would be likely to be punished accordingly.”

I think this is key. It addresses some of the concerns that have been expressed by committee members.

Furthermore, it talks about mitigating the risks of missing a vote or system failures, which have been brought forward by members of this committee. I think what they have done at the U.K. Parliament is rapidly implement this with testing, so it's an incremental approach. It has been rapid, but it does sort of set a precedence, given the fact that they have 800 years or 900 years of history. We talk about defending our institutions, but if the U.K. Parliament can do this in a matter of weeks, why shouldn't we consider doing the same thing, especially given we are in the same global pandemic? They certainly have addressed some of the same concerns. They haven't gotten into party politics to delay things; they've embraced the change.

There is a strong rationale, and I have quite a bit more information that I've gathered that supports our moving forward on electronic and remote voting. It is consistent with the other recommendations we have already voted on and adopted, which are to move essentially to replicating some of the more formal proceedings of the House in a virtual environment. Obviously, we need to have a way for us to vote.

I'll leave it at that for the moment, but I welcome more discussion on this. I have quite a few more points.

The Chair: You're next, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I'm very glad to hear my friend Mr. Turnbull talk so highly of the U.K. and I couldn't agree with him more that what the United Kingdom is doing is showing fantastic leadership in embracing technology. At the end of the day, they are using a hybrid model of Parliament to implement that and using their chamber for that. I appreciate the comments on how we need to rely very heavily on what the U.K. is doing and watch what they are doing.

I will also note with interest that I keep up on my U.K. politics and I'm just giving you the update. If you check the Hansard from today, the Conservative House leader.... I won't go through this and quote the three pages I printed off, but it looks like they are returning to full form next week. They may have reduced numbers again, but they're getting rid of.... I have the comments from the Labour shadow leader of the House, the government House leader, that they are going to be going back.

I'm not suggesting we do that. Don't get me wrong, but if we're going to talk about the U.K. and talk about all the good things, I think we need to get the fundamental down pat first of having a hybrid, getting that, and as recommendation NDP 3 says, “incremental” change. That should be our priority of the hybrid Parliament, and then we look at adding all these things. We are putting the cart before the horse, or again, we are being selective on what our friends in the U.K. are saying.

I'll leave it at that, and I'll spare you the quotes.

• (2205)

The Chair: Thank you for that. It was a very enthusiastic exchange.

Mr. Eric Duncan: As always, with the U.K., I talk U.K. politics.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Duncan, for a lot of that information. I certainly appreciate it.

I just have to say, though, I am a little frustrated by this conversation. I don't know how many witnesses said to us repeatedly that we simply have not had enough time in this committee to fully study what we are trying to do.

For me, when I look at some of these, I understand what I've agreed to; I understand the first recommendation that we worked so hard on, but what I see there is a process that needs to unfold, and right now, in my opinion, we are not in a place of being able to say that we're going to do virtual voting. We haven't discussed a whole mess of factors here. I'm concerned that it feels to me as though the committee, or maybe it's more the governing side, really just wants to push this report through and get everything done and tied up in a bow, while I really hope that PROC continues this important work.

This is for the benefit of our democracy. I want to be clear that this is not about a report. For me, this is about having a fundamental discussion about what democracy looks like in the middle of a pandemic. This can't be taken lightly.

We can compare ourselves to the U.K., and I understand why we do that, but it's also important that we remember that this is a Canadian context. There are realities here that we have to address. When we look at this, I feel that we have not done the amount of research that we should. We have not had the number of witnesses that we should.

Mr. Turnbull, I have read all of the material, just as well, with a great deal of interest. There's a lot there, but there are questions arising out of that content for me that I don't have answered. Therefore, I just want to push again that I don't think we're ready for this step. It has to be an incremental approach. I believe that the work of PROC should not be finished tonight, but we should continue on to some next steps.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, thank you for that.

Next up we have Mr. Brassard, Mr. Turnbull, and Madam Normandin.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm really encouraged and buoyed by Ms. Blaney's comments here, because what we've seen today in these various recommendations, and again it's worth repeating, is well outside the scope of what this committee's mandate is throughout this COVID-19 crisis. I'm glad to hear Ms. Blaney speak in the manner in which she has, because my concern is that the governing side is using this crisis, this study, as a way to completely transform Parliament as it exists today. Again, I repeat that we're heading down a dangerous slope.

I want to go back to what Mr. Turnbull was talking about.

Ryan, you can't just cherry-pick things to suit your narrative. You have to look at everything in the context in which it was submitted. I have the letter in front of me here, and it says, "The existing level of assurance as to the identity of Members participating in divisions in person cannot be fully replicated under the remote system without (a) development work which could not be undertaken to the timescale demanded"—which we're under, and Ms. Blaney spoke about the fact that we haven't had the in-depth study that we should

have on the remote voting system or the virtual voting system—"and (b) expenditure which cannot be justified by the temporary nature of the system. The integrity of the remote system depends on the care taken by each individual Member over authentication."

I'll go on before I explain what that means. It continues, "For this reason the system can only be a temporary means to allow Members to cast votes in divisions for as long as the extraordinary conditions which prevent many from coming to the Chamber persist."

The issue over authentication is an important one, because what he's saying in that letter, at least my interpretation of what he's saying, is that there is no way to authenticate whether in fact it is the member who is voting. Perhaps it's a staff member. Until and unless those situations are resolved, and they have not been at this point, any suggestion that we move forward with this—to Ms. Blaney's concerns, and quite frankly, to my concerns, and I'm sure there are others who share in these—is not the time to be looking at electronic voting in the manner in which it's being proposed.

We have to push this off. To look at this in the context of what we're studying right now under the current pandemic, to suggest that somehow we move forward with this, this is not the time, nor is it the place to do this.

I'm really pleased to see that there are others who are starting to realize what the hell is going on here.

● (2210)

The Chair: Okay.

I have a long speakers list. I'll let it be known who's on the list: Mr. Turnbull, Madam Normandin and Mr. Gerretsen. That is the end of my list right now.

Perhaps we can get some comments there and see how we'd like to proceed.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I thank Mr. Brassard for his passionate remarks.

I think this is precisely the time to be doing this. I completely disagree, respectfully, with Mr. Brassard and Ms. Blaney. We're in a global pandemic. We know that many opposition members have been calling for additional scrutiny. They've been calling for more fulsome proceedings of the House and for Parliament essentially to resume in its full functioning, more than just its deliberative aspects but also its decision-making aspects.

What to me is really telling is that other national governments around the world have implemented this very quickly. Why are we resisting this? This is not to say that we have to do electronic voting forevermore. This is saying that we're in a global pandemic, this is an exceptional circumstance, and we need this in order to continue to function, which opposition parties have been consistently calling for. This is actually inconsistent with remarks from your own parties, over and over again, which I've heard for weeks.

I don't understand why people keep pushing back so strongly on this. It's out of some irrational fear that electronic remote voting will somehow change the way we do everything forevermore. It doesn't have to be looked at that way. This is one progressive step—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: On a point of order, “irrational”...? I just want to encourage the member to not—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, “irrational fear”; that’s what I said.

I didn’t swear.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That’s not very respectful language. Let’s—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That’s not disrespectful language.

Mr. John Brassard: This is from a member who opposes 12 members of a committee from voting on motions at committee. If you want to talk about irrational, let’s talk about committees and how the powers of committees have been castrated as a result of—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, Madam Chair, who has the floor?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I wasn’t finished what I was saying. I used the words “irrational fear”, and I don’t think that’s disrespectful. That’s my perception. I think part of my parliamentary privilege is to express myself, and that’s exactly what I am doing here.

I want to continue with my point. In our report, the Conservatives asked specifically for an account and overview of all of the provincial legislatures. From my perspective, based on the briefing note we were given, there was all kinds of other information.

You’re saying that I’m cherry-picking, and you’re asking for information, but in the report it’s not reflected currently that New Zealand, the EU Parliament, Brazil, France, Spain—all of them—have moved towards remote or electronic voting of some kind. Some of them have also adopted proxy voting. I even went back and looked at Hansard late last night. In the blues for meeting 13, Siwan Davies from the National Assembly for Wales talked about how they had moved to weighted voting but also electronic voting.

I think the vast majority of national legislatures have moved towards some form of remote or electronic voting. I think we should be doing the same.

• (2215)

The Chair: Next up is Madam Normandin, and then Mr. Gerretsen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: One of the points that were raised is that we don’t know how long this pandemic will last. So we don’t know how long everyone’s parliamentary privilege will be violated. In fact, the right to vote, including against our party occasionally or freely on certain issues, is one of the parliamentary privileges. Not everything can be done through a block vote or by proxy. My understanding of the hybrid formula is that only members on site could exercise that parliamentary privilege, and those who remain in remote regions could not.

I want to remind you that our recommendation says that this would require a secure electronic voting system, as we will not recommend that just any voting system be used. I think this would fall under the NPD 3 recommendation, whereby any new way to proceed would first be approved by recognized parties before the voting method in the House is changed. Once we have found an adequate voting system, the recognized parties would need to give their consent.

It seems to me that there is still a process leading to the implementation of a new secure voting method. So I don’t see why all members could not fully exercise their parliamentary privileges.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next is Mr. Gerretsen, and then maybe we can vote.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I just wanted to say hi and let you know that I’m here and that I’m taking over for my substitute. I’ve arrived back from Ottawa. I see that you have been going at it for a while. It’s great to be back. I’m looking forward to my first vote. I hope that can happen really soon.

The Chair: Yes. You joined us, I think, from the lobby of the House of Commons in Ottawa earlier. It looked like a lobby room or something. Welcome back.

Mr. Eric Duncan: We’re halfway done.

The Chair: Yes, we’re almost there. We’re halfway done.

Mr. Genuis, are you subbing in now for Mr. Brassard?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I’m not subbing in. I’m at the table. Am I allowed to make a comment in that context?

The Chair: My goodness, we’ve had so many comments. I’m very lenient. Can you make a 30-second comment?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I’m not capable of that, but I’ll try to make it 60 seconds. How’s that?

Madam Chair, Eric will correct me if I’m wrong on this, but my understanding is that in the British House of Commons, for instance, they do in-person voting, but they have an in-person voting system that doesn’t require every member to be in the chamber at the same time. They have a process of in-person voting that involves a rotation through the lobbies, or something like that. We could very much envision a voting system that addresses some of the very real security concerns that have been raised involving in-person voting while still respecting public health guidelines. That would go in a bit of a different direction from this recommendation.

In particular, in Canada, our institutions are more vulnerable to staff members voting and proxy voting, and I think that would be a bad thing in terms of the independence we expect from members. I think we have to be sensitive to that if we’re concerned about the rights and privileges of members, so I would put that out there.

• (2220)

The Chair: We’ve had a lot of debate on this issue. I think our support staff and everyone are exhausted. We’re almost at the end. Some of the recommendations that come after this have already been dealt with, so there’s not much more. I hope that I can call a vote on this matter.

Would you like to vote on this?

Okay, we’ll have a recorded vote, Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Andre Barnes: Madam Chair, as a technical amendment to the recommendation, it should probably read “House of Commons” as opposed to “Parliament”, as Parliament includes both the Senate and the House.

The Chair: Absolutely. That was a good catch. We can only make recommendations for the House of Commons, so that change will be reflected. It should read, “That the House of Commons set up a secure electronic voting system”, and the suggestion ends with “and communities”, which was an amendment proposed by Madam Petipas Taylor.

Justin is going to go through a recorded vote for this recommendation.

(Text of recommendation as modified agreed to: [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you so much to the clerk.

Next we have the section on question period. There are no recommendations for that.

Moving forward to the section on future work—

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm going to be a pain. I wanted to propose having a recommendation around the five-minute component.

As all of you know, we've heard repeatedly that the five-minute exchange seems to be a lot more effective, especially in a virtual placement. I'm willing to not move that we have a recommendation there if everybody.... I know we're all exhausted, but I thought it was something to bring up, the five-minute back-and-forth between the questioner and the....

The Chair: That is completely understood.

Go ahead, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I tweeted about exactly that point last week when I had my chance in the chamber. I loved the five-minute format. I found the tone of the debate much improved, and the back-and-forth allowed you to build on your arguments. I thought the same thing when I had the question period section and it was empty, but after the pandemic I, as an individual member, in future work would like to study and review how those question periods went, those accountability sessions, and whether there is a way we could improve on that.

I've heard from a lot of my colleagues within my caucus about that. If there is some way to add a line, even in the “future work” part, about reviewing it and it could be discussed with members, I think it would be worthwhile. From the perspective of bipartisanship or the tone of the chamber, it would be fantastic to consider.

The Chair: I think that might be possible. I've heard a lot of good things about it too, and personally I like watching the exchange in five minutes. It's amazing that it's not until we try something that we know whether or not we like it. I bet in PROC in the 42nd Parliament we would have talked about that and would never have come to an agreement. Once we try it, we realize that there are some good points to it.

It's up to us whether we want to incorporate it somewhere. The first page of the “future work” section has already been dealt with. We dealt with that up front. All of that has been resolved on page 48 of the English version in the first draft of recommendations there. Then I believe we move on to LIB 13.

There the recommendation is to have “a follow-up study on lessons learned from virtual Parliament to consider improvements and modernizations that can be implemented.” That could include the five-minute questioning round. It could include a lot of things. I don't know if anybody wants to limit it and make examples, but right now it's just open-ended. It could include anything, really, for us to study, or for a special committee to study.

• (2225)

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Can we perhaps add to that a line saying “including question period” and maybe, because there's been a lot of talk about voting, add “voting”?

The Chair: You would add “including but not limited to question period and voting”.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Yes.

The Chair: Andre will add that language in. This is amended LIB 13.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, I can't resist. Can we refer to it as “non-answer” period?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: How about “rhetorical question” period?

The Chair: I think we can go on and on with these jabs, but they are entertaining. They're quite witty for this time of night.

LIB 13 is amended with those inclusions but is not limited to those suggestions. Do we agree to adopt it?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: LIB 14, I believe, was moved up to the health section and has been adopted. Is that correct? We adopted that one, right?

It looks as though everyone is saying yes.

CPC 2 has already been defeated, but CPC 1 is just showing up for the first time in this report. It reads, “That the House's deadline be extended and the Committee authorized to continue its study, to allow for further evidence to be taken and to permit a fuller and more thoughtful analysis of the issues.”

It's in line with the first recommendation, LIB 13.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I have a quick suggestion. We're talking about CPC 1 and BQ 13 a bit further down, and I wonder if those could be combined just for expediency. They're very similar.

The Chair: CPC 1 and BQ 13 are both asking that the PROC committee continue its study. Is there agreement?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm actually indifferent as to which one we choose. Does anybody have a suggestion?

The Chair: We could always go with the first one on the list, CPC 1, and then add something to it that you like from BQ 13. That always seems to be the easy way of going about it.

Are you okay with CPC 1 as is, or would you like to include any element from BQ 13 that you think is unique?

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I can make a suggestion that might help.

As you said, we could start with the full text of CPC 1, and then we could include the last portion of BQ 13, which says, "in order to be ready to respond quickly to a new crisis."

The Chair: Madame Normandin, is that okay?

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I agree with adding the part where we say that we will continue the work and update it.

However, I have a question for the Conservatives. In French, it says: "Que la date butoir de la Chambre soit reportée ..." I would like to know what date this is. What exactly does the wording of the first part mean?

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards: We were given a May 15 deadline, and it was simply to indicate that we wouldn't have to stop on May 15 and could continue to look at this. That was the idea behind it.

The Chair: Since it looks like we might meet our deadline for an initial report—and I'm really hoping we do, because we have only a few more recommendations and we're on the last page—maybe it could be worded that the....

Do you want to keep that deadline language in there, or just say that the procedure committee should continue the study beyond this report?

• (2230)

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Madam Chair, that was precisely what I was going to propose. I think the issue of the deadline is moot, given that we are submitting a report. We can just say, "That the Procedure Committee continue this study".

The Chair: Is that okay?

An hon. member: Sure.

The Chair: We're taking the first few words from BQ 13, the middle of CPC 1 and then the ending of BQ 13. Essentially those say the same thing. Is everyone in agreement?

Ms. Blaney, I think you wanted to say something.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: NDP 10 and NDP 11 talk about gender representation and regional representation, and they're looking back. I apologize that I am a little bit tired and slow—and I give you guys all credit because it's 10:30 in Ottawa and only 7:30 here, so you're probably more tired than I am—but I am wondering if there is a place to add this. If we're talking about a future study, I think those

are important factors that should be looked at. I'm just throwing it out there that regional representation and gender representation be added.

The Chair: As a point about accuracy from the clerk, the deadline wasn't the House's deadline; it was the committee's deadline, which was imposed by the House. It seems that we're rewording that language anyway, but it would have been inaccurate to state it that way.

Andre, do you have what the revised recommendation looks like? Okay.

Ms. Blaney, I think we can still get to your points. I think they're unique and different enough that we should consider them separately. Is that okay?

On CPC 1, as amended, are we all in favour?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: CPC 1, as amended, is adopted.

CPC 2 has not been adopted and BQ 13 has been struck. Now we're on to NDP 9.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Chair, I'm happy to remove that one at this point. We have the additions that I required in the first recommendation.

The Chair: NDP 9 is removed. Is everyone in favour of NDP 10?

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I have a really quick suggestion again. I think NDP 10 and NDP 11 are similar enough that they could read "review regional and gender" or "review gender and regional representation". They're almost identical, other than that their focus is different, so maybe they could be combined and we could vote on them both together. I would support both.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm okay with that.

The Chair: Is everyone in agreement to adopt an amended NDP 10 that will include "regional representation"?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: NDP 11 is removed and "regional representation" is moved up.

We are on the last recommendation.

Mr. Duncan, you'd like to say something before we move to it?

Mr. Eric Duncan: I don't want to jinx it, but I want to ask Ms. Blaney if that could be removed as well and perhaps be discussed outside this report.

When we have a take-note debate, which we're required to do in the House, there could be some conversations about making permanent changes to the Standing Orders and what that process may look like. I know we are about seven and a half hours in, but I think we could be talking further as the procedure and House affairs committee about how we handle that take-note debate, how we can make that worthwhile as PROC and perhaps what mechanism there is to respond to it.

I'm not opposed to it, but perhaps we can deal with that as PROC when we get back to some semblance of normalcy.

• (2235)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: After seven and a half hours, yes, I will agree to that.

The Chair: Therefore that suggestion no longer exists, and we have completed our report. We need to move a motion to adopt this.

Is that what you were going to say, Mr. Vaive?

The Clerk: Yes, Madam Chair. It was to not forget to adopt the motion at the end. I think you have the document.

The Chair: Yes, I do. I'm quite excited to get to this point. The motion is right here.

I'm really impressed by everyone's ability to hang in there for this long and still have passion and still make their points known. I admire it from all parties. I was in a hurry to get through this, and I think Ms. Blaney made reference to that too, but at the same time I want a quality report. I know we're going to get some supplementary and dissenting opinions that will have some really good points in them as well. Thanks for advocating your positions and raising them. I thought they were all really good points.

I'm going to move that the draft report as amended be adopted, and that the draft report be entitled.... Are there any suggestions as to what the committee report should be called?

Mr. Eric Duncan: Since we took Mr. Brassard's name out of the title, maybe we could call it "The Brassard Report" and make it up to him.

I have no suggestions.

Mr. John Brassard: I would go for that.

Madam Chair, I had to break the news to my kids yesterday that their dad's name might not be in the report, and they were really sad.

The Chair: That's too bad. I know how disappointing that is to our children. It's funny; my son always says that nobody in his class cares that I'm an MP, and he's in grade 1. I'm thinking that's true. I need that dose of reality every now and then. He doesn't care what we do.

Are there any recommendations for a name for the report? There are no recommendations. Are we going to leave this up to Andre?

Mr. Eric Duncan: Yes.

The Chair: Andre, are you comfortable with coming up with a title?

Mr. Andre Barnes: Madam Chair, I don't mean to pass the buck, but I think the clerk had a good title. It was the title of the study, "Parliamentary Duties and the COVID-19 Pandemic".

The Chair: Maybe we can hear from the clerk, then.

The Clerk: It's not my suggestion per se. It was just the name that the study was given, which was "Parliamentary Duties and the COVID-19 Pandemic". That's really just as much an administrative identifier as anything. You can choose whatever title you want.

The Chair: Okay, we're considering the title of "Parliamentary Duties and the COVID-19 Pandemic".

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: There is a book called *Love in the Time of Cholera*. If we wanted to be poetic, we could title this *The House of Commons in the Time of COVID-19*.

[English]

The Chair: That might make it a little more enticing for people to want to read it one day.

The cover may not match what's in the book. Never judge a book by its cover, by its title, but I think the bland one is probably okay.

Is it okay with everyone?

Okay, then I move that the draft report as amended be adopted and that the report be entitled "Parliamentary Duties and the COVID-19 Pandemic".

Should I be reading this out? Clerk, I'm looking to you on this.

• (2240)

The Clerk: Madam Chair, technically they are motions. You can sort of let the committee know what the motions are and what they say, and then the committee can agree to those. You can do them one at a time as well, if you want.

The Chair: The first one is that the report be adopted as amended.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Okay. Everyone was already in agreement to entitle it "Parliamentary Duties and the COVID-19 Pandemic".

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Blake Richards: We'll do the adoption of the report not "on division" but in the modified protocol we are using instead of "on division".

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Richards.

The third motion is that the chair, the clerk and the analyst be authorized to make such grammatical and editorial changes as may be necessary without changing the substance of the report.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion is that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

The Clerk: If I may intervene before the committee makes a decision on that, I just want to point out the fact that when a committee, pursuant to Standing Order 109, does request a government response, a report, once it's returned to the House, can't be concurred in until such time as the government response has been presented or tabled in the House. That is something the committee should ponder before they make a decision on whether or not they want to ask for a government response.

The Chair: We went over this before, and I'm starting to forget.

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm in favour of the response. That should be expected of a government in terms of these kinds of interchanges. There should be a response.

We were given a short deadline to do this. The government could certainly do so quickly if it chose as well. We should have a government response. That is only reasonable.

The Chair: Is the committee in agreement that we request a response from the government?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you for pointing that out. That was important to know.

The next motion reads that dissenting or supplementary opinions, of no more than 10 pages in length, be submitted electronically, in both official languages, to the clerk of the committee, not later than 5 p.m. on May 14, 2020. That is tomorrow by 5 p.m.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion reads that, pursuant to the House motion of April 11, 2020, the chair deposit the report with the Clerk of the House, no later than May 15, 2020.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Okay, congratulations, everyone. We are done for today.

There's one last thing before you go. I just want to give the clerk an opportunity in case he wanted to bring anything up that was missed or in case he has any comments or reminders for anyone.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I have nothing in particular, other than to mention that in the next two days we'll finalize the report in terms of any last translations that need to be done and the production with the Parliamentary Publications team.

The means by which the report will be transmitted to the Clerk of the House on May 15 will be by way of an email from the committee inbox.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Duncan, do you have a comment or are you just saying good-bye?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: I'm sorry to interrupt, Madam Chair. I just want to say thank you to you and to the clerk, the analysts and the interpreters. This was a marathon session. I want to recognize all their work and say good night to everyone.

The Chair: Absolutely, and thank you to the translators as well.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Yes, the translators.

The Chair: I was feeling for the translators today.

Thank you to all of the support staff who are present and on site today.

To all of you, thank you. Good night. Congratulations.

The meeting is adjourned.

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