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Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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Monday, December 13, 2021

Chair: Mr. Pat Kelly



Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

Monday, December 13, 2021

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

[*English*]

I must inform the members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions and cannot entertain points of order or participate in debate.

We can now proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the official opposition. I am now ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Brassard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): I nominate Pat Kelly for the position of chair of the committee.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

[*English*]

It has been moved by Mr. Brassard that Pat Kelly be elected chair of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Are there any further motions?

[*English*]

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the House, I should put the motion to the question, and I should go with a recorded vote, unless there's consent of the committee.

Is it the will of the committee to adopt that Mr. Kelly be elected chair of the committee?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Kelly duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair (Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Thank you very much.

I appreciate your confidence in me to chair this very important standing committee. It's a real pleasure to rejoin this committee. I

spent a couple of years on the ethics committee. In fact, it was my first committee assignment after I was elected in 2015, so I'm delighted to be back and I look forward to serving all members of the committee as your chair.

If the committee is in agreement, I will proceed to the election of the vice-chairs.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House of Commons order of November 25. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Regarding the speaking list, the committee clerks will do their best to maintain a consolidated order.

I'll also take this opportunity to remind participants of this meeting that taking screenshots or photos is not permitted.

The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

Perhaps I'll just dispense with the rest of that part and proceed directly to the election of the vice-chairs. The first vice-chair will be a member of the governing party's side.

I will open the floor to nominations for vice-chair.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I've raised my hand.

The Chair: Are you nominating yourself, or are you nominating a member of...?

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: No, I choose to nominate a colleague.

The Chair: You have the floor. Please, go ahead.

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

This is my first time joining this committee, and it's a pleasure to be here with all of you, even though it is virtually this week.

I certainly do hope we can work collaboratively on the important matters that are tabled at this committee to study as we move forward.

For today, I would like to nominate my colleague Ms. Iqra Khalid as vice-chair of this committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Iqra Khalid is nominated.

Are there any other nominations for vice-chair?

Seeing none, I would again put it to the committee. If there is agreement among the committee members, we will dispense with the recorded vote.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I declare Iqra Khalid vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: The second vice-chair—

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

I nominate René Villemure for the position of second vice-chair of the committee.

• (1125)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

There are no other nominees for the second vice-chair.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I declare Monsieur Villemure the second vice-chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: If it's the will of the room here, I will proceed to the routine motions. We have a number of them to go through this morning. I hope we can do this fairly quickly.

The first routine motion, which would have been distributed to most members of the committee....

Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, as we haven't established ground rules, I'm just wondering if I could provide you with notice at the appropriate time of some motions that are outside the routine motions.

The Chair: I understand that there are members of the committee who do have outside motions. I will add you to that.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

The Chair: When we are finished with the routine motions, I will go to other motions that may arise from the floor.

I will now ask, though, for a motion on analyst services. These motions were distributed to the committee.

Can someone—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: On a point of order, Chair, respectfully, I believe it's members who propose the routine motions.

The Chair: Yes. That's what I'm asking for.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

The Chair: Go right ahead if you'd like to lead us off with the first one.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I think I'll let my colleague Ms. Hefpner do it.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Sure.

The first motion is as follows:

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

The Chair: Thank you.

All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

At this moment, I can now invite the analysts to join the table.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Shall I carry on?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: On the subcommittee on agenda and procedure, I move:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five members, namely

—a certain number of members that I don't have here—

the chair and one member from each recognized party; and that the subcommittee work in a spirit of collaboration.

The Chair: I would ask you to maybe rephrase that to make sure it's clear that you were moving that it be composed of five members.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: I move the following:

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

The Chair: Thank you.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: The next motion reads, “That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive and publish evidence and to have that evidence published when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present including two members of the opposition parties and two members of the government party, but when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present.”

The Chair: Okay. You are moving that the chair be authorized to hold meetings and receive and publish evidence when a quorum is....

I'm sorry, which...? Could you...?

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: It's on meeting without a quorum. Is that...?

The Chair: Right.

It's “provided that at least four members are present including one member of the opposition and one member of the government”.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Sure.

The Chair: Okay. So I got that correctly.

All those in favour of the motion? Any opposed?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Sorry, but just to seek clarification, are we saying “two” members of the opposition and “two” members of the government, or is it “one”?

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: It says “two” here. I was just reading it.

The Chair: Okay.

This will be up to the members. We may end up needing a quick moment here. The routine motion that is typically passed would be...or the one that was adopted in the last Parliament was “one” and “one”.

Ms. Hefpner, you said “two” and “two”.

We might need some discussion on this. Is “two” and “two” acceptable?

Mr. John Brassard: Can I just have a minute, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: If it's the will of the committee, I'm going to suspend—if that's all right—this routine motion and carry on with the others while we.... Perhaps members may want to confer with their whip's staff.

If that's acceptable, I'm going to move on to the next routine motions.

Mr. John Brassard: Yes, please do.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Time for opening remarks and questioning of witnesses:

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

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

● (1130)

The Chair: Is there any discussion on that? Is that acceptable? This differs from the one in the previous Parliament a little bit in that the motion for five to seven minutes was adopted before, but it's going to be up to the committee if we want to accept it as moved. Is there any objection?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, I also have a routine motion that I would like to put on notice of motions before we get to the next one. It's regarding witnesses. It's not on your list. It's a routine motion that I would like to add.

The Chair: Okay, you have the floor, Mr. Green, for your motion under witnesses. Go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you. It reads:

That each party represented on the committee be entitled to select one witness per two-hour witness panel.

The Chair: So you're moving that each party can do so.

Is there any discussion on that motion?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm just wondering if the member can explain a little bit about the logic behind that. Also, if the member was going to propose it, it would have been nice for all of us to have it in writing beforehand, including the member from the Bloc in a translated version as well.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As this is the inaugural or initial meeting, there's no requirement for notices of motion. This is a routine motion, particularly for this committee, the rationale being that hearing from a diverse group of witnesses is a vital part of committee work. Whether these committees are doing their own studies or reviewing a bill that has been passed at second reading by the House, if witnesses are apportioned based on the proportional makeup of the House and the committee, roughly half the witnesses will come from the government side, and the opposition will have to split the other half.

In the last Parliament, this rotation was put in place through an opposition motion sponsored by Michelle Rempel Garner, which instructed the health committee that studied COVID-19. We found it worked very well, and we would also like the opportunity at this committee to have input on the selection of witnesses.

The Chair: I'm going to go to the question if there's no discussion.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I guess the question I would have is if... I'm not certain if I understand the import that each opposition party would be able to introduce a proposed witness who will therefore have two hours of testimony before the committee. I'm just trying to figure that out. If that's the case, would that not unduly lengthen the amount of time?

Usually, when we ask for witnesses to come, they appear in a panel. That panel is during a regular meeting of the committee, and that time is split up, as opposed to having one witness for a certain period of time.

I'm just wondering if the honourable member, Mr. Green, could explain.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm happy to restate the motion, which would also perhaps some time for the translators. I'll read it slowly so that everybody can gather it:

That each party represented on the committee be entitled to select one witness per two-hour witness panel.

This would be shared in proportion to the makeup of the committee.

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Villemure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Mr. Chair, forgive me for asking you the question. The answer may seem obvious to you, but this is the first time I have sat on this committee. Usually, the committee receives each panel of witnesses for one hour, correct?

A voice: It depends.

Mr. René Villemure: Okay, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm a little bit wary, to be honest. In my past six years as a participant in various committees, we've always come to a consensus on the witnesses we bring in to testify. What if a witness can't make it for two hours? Does that mean we're violating the rules of the committee?

I would really hope that, instead of putting these types of requests for how our committee functions into law, we can play it by ear in a discretionary fashion, based on each of the individual studies we go through. I hope we can work in that spirit of collaboration, instead of dictating exactly how many witnesses, for which party and for how many minutes that witness is going to be presenting.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll hear Mr. Fergus, and then I hope to try to wrap up the discussion, if we can. It's up to members, but we have a number of routine motions that I would like to get through quickly.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I can offer a solution.

I am a member not only of this committee but also of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. In the discussions to determine the ground rules, there were very intense but collaborative negotiations between the whips of each of the recognized political parties in the House. No one mentioned a motion to change the operating rules like this.

Could we do as Mr. Brassard has asked on a previous motion, that is, skip this motion to give the whips time to discuss it? In the meantime, we could move on to the other motions which I hope are more routine housekeeping motions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm fascinated by all the interventions today. It's good to be back. I think this is going to be a very interesting committee.

What I would say through you, Mr. Chair, to the members of this committee, is that each committee is the master of its own domain. We don't have to wait for PROC. If that were the case, why would we have independent committees? We would basically concede ev-

erything to the whips, and 300 members of Parliament could go home.

I would ask that this motion is on the table. I would like to test the will of this committee. Having the ability in a minority situation....

I don't believe in consensus in this committee. I think that we're going to be working on straight-up votes, so I'll put that out there. We're going to need each and every vote, each and every time.

What I would like to do is test the will of this committee. When that's done, I'd like to move another motion.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have Mr. Fergus and Mr. Brassard.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I think it's important to remind members of the committee of the nature of routine motions. They are common to all committees of the House of Commons. That is why the whips are in full agreement on a number of issues, to ensure that everyone has a voice at the table.

All committees are indeed masters of their own domain, but we should not go overboard with routine motions, which are common to all committees.

I extend an olive branch to my dear colleague as a sign of peace. Let's give the whips' offices a chance to have a discussion on this particular motion and see if they agree.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Mr. Brassard, and then I really would like to deal with this one way or another.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to take Mr. Green up on his offer and put it to the committee to find out its will, so I call the vote.

The Chair: All right.

I was going to say that there does not appear to be unanimous consent to defer this, so we'll have a recorded vote on Mr. Green's motion.

Indeed, to be clear, there is no more debate.

Is there further debate on this motion?

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Look, this is not a good start.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. I have Mr. Green first.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Oh, my apologies.

Mr. Matthew Green: I just want to reference, in the routine motions, for folks who may have been around for a long time or what have you, that the next motion we're about to do will set in stone how we're going to operate motions. If I had waited to put these, what I believe to be, routine motions, which constitute the framework and the operations of this committee, then there is an opportunity where, in the next motion on notice of motions, I would have been bound by that.

I don't want to get too far afoot on this, but there is a procedural order in which this stuff happens, and it is quite right that I move this motion at this time to ensure that I didn't get any other opinions or interpretations as to what it might look like in terms of the time requirements for a notice of motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We started by talking about the importance of working in a spirit of collaboration, and that's really what I intended to do. Mr. Green knows full well that I'm quite approachable and I'm not unreasonable. However, this motion is being introduced without notice, without discussion and without the documents in both official languages. Yet, as I said, the whips have reached an agreement on how to proceed.

I am sure the member's motion will eventually pass: all he has to do is rely on the majority. Why does he not agree that we should take the time to consider the full implications of this proposal? It won't matter: if no one changes their mind, this proposal will pass at the next meeting.

I don't want to waste the committee's time. However, I am willing to do so, if we don't agree to take a little time to discuss this issue among reasonable people. That would be really unfortunate, because I don't want to waste the committee's time. Having said that, I want to have the opportunity to properly consider this proposal and its implications. I would also like to give the whips' offices an opportunity to discuss it.

I hope we will all be reasonable.

Mr. Green, your motion will still pass—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Fergus. To be clear, are you moving to adjourn debate on Mr. Green's motion?

Hon. Greg Fergus: No, I am not.

The Chair: You had said that you had hoped, and it sounded like that's kind of where you were heading.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I would like us to put this motion aside, deal with the other motions and come back to it when the whips' offices have had sufficient time to discuss it.

In good faith, all the whips have reached agreement on the routine motions that we are adopting. I have no objection to making some reasonable changes, but what the member is proposing is

completely new. I was not a member of the special committee to which Mr. Green was referring, but as far as I know, no other committee has passed a motion like this. If it worked so well in committees in the last Parliament, why is it not one of the routine motions? It wasn't even proposed, no one said anything about it.

I personally am not comfortable and would like to have some time to discuss it. If a majority agrees to this motion, it will still pass at the next meeting, and I can't do anything about it. However, I would like the opportunity to have a little discussion on it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Seeing no further debate, we'll proceed to the vote on the motion.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus : I could continue to debate it, but I would like to hear from other members—

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, there were no other... I've exhausted the speaking list and would like to go to the vote.

Ms. Khalid, would you like to speak on Mr. Green's motion?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, absolutely.

Over the past six years as we went through studies and tried to do our committee work, it's been the nature of the committees that I've sat on in the past for us to come up with witness lists together—as a subcommittee perhaps on agenda—and really discuss and iron out how and what the scope of X, Y and Z study is going to be and who we'd like to hear from, always giving an opportunity to each party to be able to put forward witnesses who would enhance and add to the substance of whatever study it is that we're working on.

I am always very wary of our trying to limit and box ourselves in and not leaving that discretion up to committee members based on studies we've done and how we as a committee operate. I really appreciate that and would hope that we could continue, as I have done over the past six years, to work in the spirit of collaboration with members on an issue-by-issue basis and continue to make things work that way.

I understand that the governing party and the government does not have the chair in this committee, but I think this committee has the potential to really tackle the challenges of our time, especially when it comes to privacy and access to information. When we think about and really work on those issues that the scope of the committee's really about, I think such a motion would limit how we would be able to continue with those studies.

Like my colleague Mr. Fergus, I would also like to think about what the implications of such a motion would be for limiting or expanding what witnesses could be heard from what party, and how much time they would have, or how much these could be expanded. I would also like to perhaps put this aside for a little bit and move on to the next motion to see if we can work through those as we mull over what Mr. Green's motion really means.

The Chair: Ms. Saks, go ahead.

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

My opening statement today on my first day on this committee expressed a genuine interest and desire for collaborative work at committee. I was excited to join this group. I come from the environment and foreign affairs committees prior to this, and I think there's deep, deep work for the committee concerning privacy and other important issues that matter to Canadians and the work of the House. The value of collaborative work with our whips in leading into the work in this room is that we set structure so that even in times when we hold the position of chair as the government or we don't, the work that we do matters and how we move through that work also matters.

Similar to the previous motion on meeting without quorum that my colleague Ms. Hepfner read and we decided to set aside to seek clarification, and in an effort to move this committee forward today with what are routine and standard motions, I think it would be in the same spirit of that collaborative work in setting the tone of this committee that we do the same thing with Mr. Green's motion at this time.

No one likes surprises. No one likes motions that are just put on the table without their being received with prior notice or translation for our colleagues from the Bloc or other members of the committee for whom English is not their first language—and it doesn't set a tone of collaborative work. We will disagree on many things here, but nevertheless, to start out of the gate this way without discussion on what is an important piece of the structure of how we move through the studies, the information, and the witnesses we'll be working with here, frankly, I'm a little bit disappointed. Therefore, I move this discussion be put to the side so we can get through the routine motions that will structure the work this committee will be doing going forward. I think in the spirit of the previous motion that we put to the side, we should be doing the same here.

● (1150)

The Chair: Are you moving adjournment of debate on this motion?

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: At this time, I am.

The Chair: That's not debatable, so we'll go straight to a recorded vote on adjournment of the debate on Mr. Green's motion.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Saks moved that we adjourn the debate on the motion moved by Mr. Green.

Some hon. members: Agreed

Some hon. members: No.

The Clerk: Yeas are five, and nays are five.

The Chair: I vote to adjourn the debate, and we will take this up at another time.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: If I may move to the—

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, I have another motion.

The Chair: Mr. Green, we have routine motions, and I'm—

Mr. Matthew Green: That's correct. I have another motion pertaining to in camera committees, and it's pretty germane, so at this time I'd like to move it.

The Chair: Go ahead and state your motion.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much.

I do have this in two official languages, should anybody require it:

That the committee may meet in camera only for the following purposes: (a) to consider a draft report; (b) to attend briefings concerning national security; (c) to consider lists of witnesses; (d) for any other reason, with the unanimous consent of the committee;

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

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

Mr. Chair, there have been times in previous Parliaments where the government has tried to move committee meetings in camera to force difficult issues and votes behind closed doors and to avoid public scrutiny.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: On a point of order, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: My colleague should slow down a little for the sake of the interpretation.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: Through you, just to make sure, did the honourable member also receive a translated version?

The Chair: Yes, but you are reading this into the record and we just ask you to go at a pace that the interpreters can keep up with.

● (1155)

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm happy to go slowly. That's not a problem.

I will repeat, in the event that it was missed by translation.

The Chair: Just one moment while we ensure that the interpreters actually have a copy.

Carry on, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There have been times in previous Parliaments when the government has tried to move committee meetings in camera to force difficult issues and votes behind closed doors and to avoid public scrutiny. Even in minority Parliaments in which the government could not act unilaterally, there were times when this was attempted, and as a consequence valuable committee time ended up being wasted debating this.

For that reason, there is value to set out parameters at the front end and in routine motions that specify when in camera meetings can take place. Otherwise, we may be in situations where the work of the committee can be wasted in debating frivolous attempts to move in camera.

Mr. Chair, we have heard in preceding comments on previous motions put how people are envisioning the nature of this committee. Just so we're clear, I will share with you that my intention at this committee is to provide a certain level of transparency and accountability to the proceedings of this government.

This is a significant moment in time coming out of COVID, Mr. Chair, and there are likely going to be some very significant conversations. As we have heard time and time again from the government side, sunshine is the best antiseptic. I would like to see this committee operate at the highest level of all committees pertaining to this House, with the highest levels of transparency and accountability, and without attempts to filibuster or to frivolously move things in camera and out of the public eye.

I would call upon all members of this committee to consider this motion in its seriousness, given our experience in the last minority Parliament, to ensure that the discussions of this committee are done in such a way that we know from the outset exactly how we're going to deal with matters pertaining to public interest within this committee.

This has been provided in both official languages, and I'm looking forward to hearing the remarks of members around this table.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Pursuant to Standing Order 67(1) and 67(2), I rule this motion out of order.

We now go back to the routine motions we were on, and I am going to ask now if I could have a member from the floor proceed with the routine motions.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you, Chair.

The motion on document distribution reads as follows:

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

The Chair: One moment, please.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: The motion on working meals reads:

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

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: The motion on travel, accommodation and the living expenses of witnesses reads:

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

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1200)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: The motion on access to in camera meetings reads as follows:

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

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: The motion on transcripts of in camera meetings reads:

That one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee or by their staff; and that the analysts assigned to the committee also have access to the in camera transcripts.

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: The next one is with regard to notice of motion:

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

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: The motion on orders of reference from the House respecting bills reads:

That in relation to orders of reference from the House respecting bills,

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

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

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

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Now to the motion on technical tests for witnesses, is everyone on the same page?

It reads:

That the clerk inform each witness who is to appear before the committee that the House administration support team must conduct technical tests to check the connectivity and the equipment used to ensure the best possible sound quality; and that the Chair advise the committee, at the start of each meeting, of any witness who did not perform the required technical tests.

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: The motion on linguistic review reads:

That all documents submitted for committee business that do not come from a federal department or members' offices, or that have not been translated by the Translation Bureau be sent for prior linguistic review by the Translation Bureau before being distributed to members.

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, is now the appropriate time to present motions?

The Chair: No, one moment. I have other motions that I want to make sure I've dealt with under routine motions before we proceed. In fact, I'm going to need a moment to confer with the clerk.

Thank you very much for concluding our routine motions. I am going to entertain other motions at this time—

• (1205)

Mr. Matthew Green: How does that happen, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Sorry?

Mr. Matthew Green: How is a speaking list created before we get to this section?

The Chair: I had been informed that Mr. Brassard wished to move a motion, and then you informed me that you also wished to move a motion, so I will go in that order. It looks like Mr. Villeneuve has a motion as well, so I'm going to go with Mr. Brassard first, and we'll proceed after that.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Chair.

I have a point of clarification before I do move my motion. There was one routine motion that we were to come back to with respect to the designation of two members and two members. Were we not supposed to—

The Chair: That's correct.

Are we ready to return to that, or do you wish to—

Mr. John Brassard: Yes, and just so you know, Chair, I was dealing with the wrong sheet at the time, so now that I have that clarified...

The Chair: Okay, so if you wish to do that, let's knock that off first, then I'll go to you.

Mr. John Brassard: Sure.

The Chair: Do we have a mover? I guess we're resuming debate on the meeting without quorum.

May I have either you or perhaps Ms. Hefner—

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Are we saying two members or one member? Two members, okay.

The motion on meeting without a quorum then reads: "That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and publish evidence when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present including two members of the opposition parties and two members of the government, but when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present."

The Chair: Thank you.

All those in favour?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Sorry, Mr. Chair, I have a question, just a point of clarification.

When we say "two members of the opposition parties", are we saying two different opposition parties or is it just any two members from the opposition benches?

The Chair: The motion Ms. Hefner delivered should refer just to "opposition", not "opposition parties" So I would take that to be any members who are members of an opposition party.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Brassard, you have the floor.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To inform you, I have submitted to the clerk, in both official languages, the motion that I'm going to be presenting.

I move that, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), the Committee undertake a study into issues of conflict of interest and the Lobbying Act in relation to pandemic spending, provided that

(a) the evidence and documentation received by the Committee during the First and Second sessions of the 43rd Parliament on the subject be taken into consideration by the Committee in the current session;

(b) the Committee adopt the report entitled "Questions of Conflict of Interest and Lobbying in Relation to Pandemic Spending", originally adopted as the Committee's Second Report in the Second Session of the 43rd Parliament; and

(c) dissenting or supplementary opinions be submitted electronically, in both official languages, to the Clerk of the Committee, within 24 hours of the adoption of this motion.

The Chair: Okay. This motion is in order. Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

The motion is debatable. Is there any discussion on the motion?

Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've asked the clerk, and it's been six months since this committee has convened.... Obviously, there was important work that was being done in the last Parliament relating to pandemic spending and conflicts of interest, and I'm asking for the committee to re-establish the report. We know that there's been almost \$500 billion in pandemic spending, and I think it's important for Canadians, and indeed, for this committee, to have the confidence that the pandemic spending has been done in an open, transparent and accountable manner. I'm asking for the committee's support for this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

I have Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There are two simple things I can say about the motion.

First, this was debated in the last Parliament, when I was on this committee. We wrote a report, we passed it, we tabled it in the House of Commons, and then the House of Commons passed it. It makes no sense for us to waste our time with it here.

Furthermore, the issue of facial recognition technology is very important to me as a parliamentarian and as a member of the Black community in Canada. In the last Parliament, the committee passed a motion to conduct a study on this matter, but because of intense debate on issues that did not really reflect the priorities of Canadians, we were unable to proceed with the study. I hope that, in this new Parliament, we can do a better job for Canadians, take action and study this very important matter that affects almost one-third of Canadians.

I hope my colleagues will vote against this motion. With all due respect to my colleague Mr. Brassard, I think people are still trying to make waves when we should be moving on.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I agree with my colleague Mr. Fergus that we do need to move on. I know that this issue has been hashed and rehashed. We've discussed and over-discussed it. A report has already been published on this. I really do think it's time we focused on things that are important to Canadians, that are for the well-being of Canadians.

My colleague Mr. Fergus talked about facial recognition and its impact on racialized minorities. I really would like to explore that concept. I would like to see how facial recognition, how artificial intelligence...and as a government, as private companies, move towards more and more artificial intelligence, how business is conducted, how government is conducted, and how public service is conducted. I really think there's an opportunity here for all members of this committee to focus on this. How do we protect the privacy of Canadians? How do we make sure that whatever services are being provided are being done in an equitable way?

I think we have a really good opportunity. We have the time. All I would ask our members to do is have the will to make sure that we are working on issues that are important to our time, that are important to Canadians and that impact Canadians' lives each and every day. I would really like to move forward on that. I really encourage our colleagues around the table here to come together and focus on those issues that Canadians are really concerned about and that I know that members of this committee are also really concerned about. I'm happy to work with my colleagues to draft such a motion or to revisit other motions that were not able to see fruition in the past Parliament.

This, on the other hand, has been hashed and rehashed again and again and again. I think it's time we moved past this, put it aside, and really focused on issues that Canadians care about and that we as parliamentarians should be very, very concerned about in this committee on access to information, privacy and ethics.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

A study was already done on this topic in the last Parliament, so I wonder what could be done differently this time. The scope of the motion is so broad that I have difficulty understanding the intent behind it.

The committee's mandate must be kept in mind. There are indeed other important issues to be considered, such as facial recognition technology, as Mr. Fergus and Ms. Khalid were talking about, or the capture of personal information by foreign powers such as China, which is currently using this information against Canadians.

In this context, short of rehashing the past, what would be the point of revisiting a study that has already been done? What else could be added to it? I do not understand the validity of the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Saks.

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

As someone who's new to this committee and familiar with the report by the previous committee, I feel I need to reiterate my intention in coming to this table with all of you from all sides of the aisle in the House to do important work for Canadians on key issues that many Canadians feel vulnerable about in terms of privacy and access to information. My colleague, Mr. Fergus, mentioned facial recognition.

Canadians expect us to do that important work here. They don't want us to be rehashing what we've already come to a conclusion about and wasting valuable time. I have to say that I'm really asking that we don't entertain such motions that stir the pot on reports that we've already reviewed, quite extensively, by way of the broad motions on the table now that really don't allow us to do the important work that got tabled last time and that colleagues and members and Canadians are asking us to do this time around. As someone who is new to this committee, I'm really not comfortable in bringing up old reports that have already been concluded. I'm looking forward to moving forward on the work in this committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any further discussion?

Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I respectfully disagree with my colleagues. I think it is important. Obviously when the last session of Parliament ended, it ended unceremoniously with the June summer break and then the election being called.

I expect that there should be members around this table who look to us to determine this level of accountability, transparency and open government when it comes to this type of spending. Some of these measures have continued over the summer, and the work this committee was doing in the past Parliament looking into the conflict of interest and lobbying is the role of the ethics committee.

I'm asking that not only do we look back at the report, but also at what's happened in advance of the election being called and then subsequent to that. I think this is important information.

Similarly, if you look at what we did in the House of Commons when the government reintroduced Bill C-4, it passed through all stages of the House, went back to where it was before and the Senate passed it. So I think there's already precedent as it relates to that piece of legislation for this committee to look back to determine what new information is available to us and then allow us to consider not just the information from the past, but also any new information to be presented to Canadians.

That's what this is all about and I think it's important given, as I said, Mr. Chair, the amount of money that has been spent, the level of lobbying and the potential of conflict of interest. That is the role of the ethics committee, and I think we could spend at least a few days looking into that.

Thank you.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Villemure, you have the floor.

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

I would like my honourable colleague to tell me what he is looking for that is different—

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: I have a point of order. Could the member speak a little bit slower? The sound is inaudible and we would like to hear translation.

Thank you.

The Chair: We had a comment first from the translator, so do we have...?

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: No problem. I will do that.

I would like our colleague to clarify what he is thinking. What is he looking for that is different? It is true that a lot of money has been spent, but what is the intention behind this? What does he want to do with it?

I find it difficult to understand the purpose of redoing a report. There may be a couple of new facts, but that's not enough to convince me to do it again.

Please tell me specifically what your intention is.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Brassard, you have the floor.

Mr. John Brassard: I can, Mr. Chair, and not to restate what I stated earlier, I think there are some issues, new issues, that can come forward. If there are not, that's great, but we have the ability through this committee to call witnesses to talk about pandemic spending—again subject to accountability, making sure that Canadians are aware where that spending has gone, of any conflicts of interest that may have arisen over the period of the last several months the committee hasn't been constituted, as well as looking into the Lobbying Act. We'll have the ability to call witnesses. We've got a lot of information and it's been acknowledged that we have a lot of information available to us as a result of the previous Parliament. What new information can we add to that?

That is the intent of what I'm proposing by this motion, and I don't think I can be any more clear than that, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'm at the end of my speaking list. Are there any other members who wish to speak?

I now have Mr. Green, Mr. Villemure and Ms. Khalid.

Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to get a sense from members around the table if there are interesting early indicators of the direction we might be taking within this committee.

It serves us to be reminded of the massive amount of money that was transferred from the government over the course of COVID. One of the interesting discoveries that I made as a new member of Parliament was just how lax and opaque our lobbying registry is. It serves all Canadians to revisit what has been the largest procurement process since World War II. It's significant. Hundreds of billions of dollars have gone out.

I'm unclear, given where we are with COVID, if there is a more germane issue to this committee than what's before us today. It's significant. I hope that we have an appetite to create a gold standard for procurement, lobbying and pulling back the veil on any potential for insider dealings or any types of improprieties. What I hope for from the government's side in this process is that they would be able, every step along the way, to provide a rationale and solid evidence to assure Canadians that the hundreds of billions of dollars that went out the back door are well accounted for.

I was on the government operations and estimates committee and served on it with some members around this table. I can share with you that, from my observation of procurement, the breakneck speed with which this government and, indeed, the world had to respond to COVID provided a very unusual set of circumstances, given the volume, size and scope of COVID-related procurement coming out of the federal government. These are things that were rushed to the line for the defence of Canadians.

It's important for this committee to demonstrate over these next months—perhaps even a few years—a retroactive, honest and earnest accounting of the money that has gone out over the last two years. If we can't do that in this committee now, or if we prefer to gloss over it and somehow magically turn the page because the Prime Minister wanted to call an election—having prorogued and made a whole other set of ethical transgressions—it will be deemed fairly problematic to the Canadian public.

We've been returned to this Parliament with almost the exact same composition, with the direction from the Canadian public to continue our work to make sure we are holding each other accountable and to the highest standard of governance, ethics, transparency and accountability. That's what I'm here for. That's going to be my focus, notwithstanding the very important issues that have been raised around the table.

I share interests. In fact, I have a similar motion prepared on this as it relates to AI. I'm very interested in that, but let's not get caught in a false dichotomy that we can't continue the important work with a retroactive view of what has happened over the last two years, particularly given the start and stop of the last session. I should not have to remind members around this table that it was not a consequence of actions by members on the opposition side. It certainly wasn't our choice.

If we had had our choice, we would have continued the good work. That's what I hope to do in this committee today.

Thank you.

• (1225)

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

My colleague's argument is certainly interesting. Of course, one cannot be against virtue. However, there may be a need for a compromise that lies somewhere between not being against virtue, and undertaking a monumental task. For example, we could have two meetings on this topic. In my opinion, being against virtue is not a good idea, but starting a whole new report is not a good idea either.

I therefore invite my colleagues to think about a minimal number of meetings that could be held on this topic.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's been quite interesting listening to my colleagues and their views on this specific motion. In the past 20 months, I think our government—in fact, just team Canada—has done all that we can to ensure that Canadians are protected and had the ability to stay at home while COVID raged in public settings, whether it was through providing CERB or supporting small business through the business account or wage subsidies. I think it's a little surprising that there seems to be an automatic assumption of guilt declared by a couple of our members here on how we were able to support hundreds of thousands of Canadians to get through what has been the most challenging part of their lifetimes and of our generation.

We worked really hard—not just members on the governing side but also members from all parties—to ensure that our constituents were well supported throughout this whole process. I think we need to continue doing that—indeed, we realize that COVID is not yet over—whether through Bill C-2 or other ways. We want to continue to support Canadians and I think we should. I think we need to find that collaborative approach. We need to find that balance in the work that we do here in this committee to make sure that Canadians are feeling supported and are being supported.

The last thing I think that our committee should be doing is using this committee for political posturing or to distract from the work we've all been doing among all parties over the past 20 months. We need to ensure that, as we continue to finish the fight against COVID, we all lend our hands and work together and really try to move things forward.

I think there are other more pertinent issues that we should be looking. As members have said, this one was really hashed out in the 43rd Parliament. I think artificial intelligence, facial recognition and equity are huge topics that Canadians are very much concerned about, and we would be doing an injustice if we played into what I think may be political posturing. I think it would be an injustice if we stepped away from continuing to protect Canadians from this changing world, from the changing digital space and from the changing normal of what COVID has brought for us.

I would respectfully ask my colleagues to think about this, guys. We have an opportunity to move forward. We have an opportunity to do the right thing. We have an opportunity to really work on issues that impact each and every one of us every single day, and we can do that here in this committee. I would really encourage you to work on those issues as opposed to rehashing things that have already been settled, and not participate in what is going to be a political posturing session. I think Canadians deserve better than that.

Thank you.

• (1230)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: I'm fine right now, Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Once again, let me point out two things.

First, in the last Parliament, this committee spent not one, not two, but dozens of meetings on this topic. We heard from many witnesses. We worked on a report. I certainly commend the work of all my former colleagues who, given the difficulty of the topic, worked in a spirit of collaboration to produce a report, which was then adopted by the committee. This very voluminous report, with hundreds of quotations from dozens of witnesses, was tabled in the House of Commons less than six months ago. Not much has changed since then.

I recall that, in November of last year, the member of Parliament for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, a very honourable man, suggested that we have just one more session with witnesses to discuss this issue. Instead, we had dozens of additional sessions on technicalities. It seemed that, just because someone said “six” and someone else said “half a dozen”, there was a difference between the two and we need to look at it in detail. So the sessions went on and on.

We really exhausted the topic. A report was tabled in the House of Commons. I invite all my colleagues to read it. I read it carefully because I was on the committee that wrote it. I do not want to give the impression that all the credit goes to members of Parliament; we have to congratulate our analysts for all the good work they did under exceptional circumstances, to say the least.

I know my colleague the member for Barrie—Innisfil; he is a very honourable man. I know that he is sincere when he says that they just want to see what is new and that, if there is nothing, we will move on. I have heard that kind of talk before, and, as a result, we missed out on the opportunity to focus on issues that are much more relevant and where we're discussing the negative effects on Canadians. Instead of playing these games here in Ottawa, we want to get to work for our constituents in Quebec and Canada.

As a member of Parliament from Quebec, this is my first objective. The work of parliamentarians must focus on issues that are relevant and important to their constituents. We have the opportunity to do so. I am very concerned that, almost three years after we agreed to conduct this study on facial recognition technology, we

are still missing the opportunity to do so. As I said, we will be playing games instead of doing things that really matter to Canadians.

• (1235)

I'm going to make a plea: I'm asking my colleagues to move on to something else that is actually relevant.

I also invite them to read the report and come back to the table to explain, with arguments, why they think conditions have changed or what new elements deserve our committee's attention. We should not waste time on this issue.

I hope my colleagues will consider my heartfelt plea. We need to move on to things that are much more important to Canadians.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

These topics are certainly important. We cannot simply pretend that they do not exist.

However, something came to mind when Mr. Fergus talked about the report that was produced. I had read it at the time, long before I went into politics, and I don't think I have seen a formal response to that report from the government. That might already point us in some directions. It would be helpful to see the government respond to that report before we make our decision.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: I find it interesting; I think we've all acknowledged the size and scale of revisiting our lobbying legislation in a meaningful way, and yet there seems to be an appetite or a move toward limiting the application of this study to two days. That to me is a contradiction. If we're going to acknowledge the size and scale of it, we should be considering this in a longer view. Maybe the two sessions we have set aside for it will provide us with a framework to look at how we can elevate Canada's lobbying registry.

I can share with you, Mr. Chair, members of this committee, and people who might be watching at home, that in my own research pertaining to issues of Canadian interest, I've had to pin and research the United States of America's lobbyists registry to find connections of Canadian lobbyists who have to report in a deeper way to Congress than they do to this House of Commons. That's a problem.

We actually have a very weak lobbyists registry, in my opinion. I think there's an opportunity for us to elevate that and to create something that is more substantive. I don't think it's going to happen in two days. Maybe it doesn't happen in my lifetime as an MP. It's certainly going to be one of my pursuits, though. Having watched the comings and goings on government operations and procurement, I can assure you that there were questions—questions that all Canadians deserve to have answers to. I would hope that the government would be able to provide those to us in a meaningful way, or I would hope that, having learned from perhaps some of the gaps in our systems and principles in the previous session, we can as a committee propose to the House of Commons ways in which we can strengthen and shore up our lobbyists registry.

I know that there are members around this table with subject matter expertise. I'm keenly interested in hearing what their perspectives would be on this if they had a blank slate and we were able to draft from scratch the gold standard of a lobbyists registry. What would that look like? I can assure you that from where I sit, there are significant gaps when we have to look to the south to find tougher legislation on lobbying, given the state of their affairs there.

If the compromise is that we go to two sessions, so be it, but I hope the members of this committee have within their purview, or their line of sight, ways in which we can improve our lobbying registry and our procurement practices to ensure that we are leading in that regard and not woefully lacking, which appears to be the case currently.

Thank you.

• (1240)

The Chair: Ms. Saks.

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

Thank you, colleagues.

While there will always be an enumerable list of important issues that we need to cover and explore and, in many cases, rehash and review, I share Mr. Fergus's concern about our not getting to the matters of the day.

In my own riding of York Centre, the digital space is a terrifying one. It's filled with hate. It's filled with anti-Semitism. It's filled with inciting language that disrupts the lives of many constituents in my community. They are asking us time and again how we, as a government, find the fine line in making sure that freedom of speech is available to every constituent in the digital space they use, while at the same time making sure that communities and their narratives and sense of safety are there, not only in their day-to-day lives out on the street, but also in the digital [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] how their information is accessed, who is seeing it and so on and so forth.

We're not getting to those important conversations while the rhetoric and the temperature in the digital space continues to become hotter and hotter. We're not really taking the time in this important forum to table those discussions.

I agree there are things that we take a day on here or there, but things like AI, facial recognition, public access to information, how

the digital space is used and how it moves forward to protect Canadians' information, while also protecting them from these kinds of vulnerabilities are things we haven't got to. It's an important time to do that.

When we take time going back over old reports that have been concluded, when we take time to tweak them a bit more, we're not getting to the issues of the day that are keeping Canadians and members of my constituency up at night with regard to these platforms and how we create a safe space for the people using them.

I ask colleagues to consider that as we move forward and line up what we are going to discuss here and what the issues are that Canadians are not just asking, but demanding, of us. Community after community is asking us to engage with what happens in the digital space, yet we can't seem to get there. These technologies are evolving more quickly than our discussions, I can assure you. If we don't get to these matters of the day, I fear for what.... We're not serving Canadians well when we don't address these issues here in this forum.

Good work was done last session by the colleagues at this table. Some of them are not here. I read parts of the report. I haven't read it completely from first the page to the last page, but good work was done.

If we keep going backward, we're not moving forward on really critical issues that matter to our constituents today. I'd be terribly disappointed to see that we failed them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Hepfner.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you.

I just want to chime in as new member of the government and a new member of this committee to say I agree with a lot of the comments I heard from my Liberal colleagues here.

I have some concerns about adopting a report I haven't read. I wasn't part of this committee last time. I look forward to reading it and to learning what this committee came to, but at this point, I don't think I can support something that I don't know enough about.

I also agree with my colleagues who are suggesting there are more important issues for this committee to address, like facial recognition and AI. I think those are top of mind for Canadians. They're something that Canadians are thinking about, more so than a Lobbying Act, frankly.

I wanted to put my two cents in there, as a new member of the committee, just to say I do have concerns about moving forward on this motion.

• (1245)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I made my comments in all sincerity. I tried to convince my colleagues. As my colleague Mr. Green said, the majority of colleagues are in favour of the proposal. So I have no further comments and we can proceed to the vote.

[*English*]

The Chair: We still have speakers.

Mr. Brassard, and then Ms. Khalid.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate all of the interventions. I think we have had a good, very respectful discussion on this.

We've also talked, Mr. Chair, about the importance of moving on to some other issues, and very important issues, by the way—privacy, and facial recognition. I understand Mr. Green has a motion that I think is good for this committee to move forward on.

But this is not about resubmitting or rehashing.... This will inform the work we do not just now but going forward. I will remind you again, Chair, that much of this work basically fell off the table as a result of the election, so there is a response from the government that can come forward. But understanding and listening to the debate of my respectful colleagues I will suggest, if it's okay with you, Chair, that we move to study this for, I'm going to suggest that it not be for more than four days so we can move forward.

I would make amendment to the motion.

The Chair: Does Mr. Brassard have unanimous consent to amend his motion to four days?

Okay.

Mr. John Brassard: I thought that would be a reasonable compromise, Mr. Chair, understanding the concerns that Mr. Green had about the seriousness of this issue and about the concerns that other members had as far as other important issues were concerned.

The motion is on the floor. I will leave it to your discretion, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really do appreciate, like Mr. Brassard, the comments made by all colleagues.

I want to quickly note something that Mr. Green had said with respect to the Canadian lobbying regime. I think Canada has one of the most robust lobbying regimes in the world; it is one of the toughest. Our five-year lobbying ban is really competitive across the world in how it operates.

But as Mr. Fergus says I think we should be calling the question at this time.

The Chair: Well, we have exhausted the speakers list so we may now proceed to a vote.

There is a request for a recorded vote. We will have a recorded vote. I will turn it over to the clerk.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, we have the recorded vote on the motion by Mr. Brassard.

Mr. Bains, can you unmute yourself and tell me if you vote for or against the motion moved by Mr. Brassard?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Clerk, could you also tell him to lower his microphone?

[*English*]

The Clerk: Can you bring your boom microphone to the side of your mouth, please? Thank you.

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): I vote against it.

• (1250)

The Clerk: Thank you.

(Motion as amended negated: nays 6; yeas 4)

The Chair: The motion is defeated.

Before I go to Monsieur Villemure, I know Mr. Green was up next. He had a motion that he wished to move.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

Respecting that some of us are new around the table, and that 2021 annual reports have come out, I have a series of opportunities for us to revisit the different commissioners.

Mr. Chair, through you to the committee, would it be wise for me to break them up, or just to provide them all at once and allow people to vote on them individually?

The Chair: I'm not sure I know the nature of your motion yet.

Mr. Matthew Green: My first motion is:

That the committee invite Privacy Commissioner Daniel Therrien to brief the committee on his 2021 annual report.

Just to give you context, I also have within the same motion invitations to the Information Commissioner, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, and the Commissioner of Lobbying, just so they could provide the committee with briefings on their 2021 annual reports.

The Chair: You're asking me if I think this motion should be bundled or voted separately. I would suggest that's entirely up to you, as the mover, and the will of the committee.

Mr. Matthew Green: Okay, I'll put them together just to expedite the motion, and if people want to pick them apart they are welcome to do that. I think it will provide us with a good overview, and I'll read it as follows:

That the committee invite Privacy Commissioner Daniel Therrien to brief the committee—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, the motion I have in front of me is not what Mr. Green is speaking about. I'm not sure if my colleagues who are attending virtually have a text of the motion as well.

The Chair: I agree with you, Ms. Khalid. I have a different motion that's been circulated, but I suspect—

Mr. Matthew Green: My apologies. I got the order mixed up.

The Chair: Right, I was going to suggest that maybe Mr. Green has another motion coming that is being circulated to you.

Mr. Matthew Green: Fair enough, I'll wait for that.

The Chair: You are table-dropping the motion, I guess, verbally giving us the motion on the officers of Parliament, or do you have that—

Mr. Matthew Green: So that it can be circulated and there is no confusion, I will go with the one that I think is before people, which is:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h)(vii), the committee study the use or possible use of facial recognition technology by various levels of government in Canada, law enforcement agencies, private corporations and individuals; that the committee investigate how this technology will impact the privacy, security and safety of children, seniors and vulnerable populations; that the committee examine the impact of facial recognition technology on racialized communities; and that the study include how this technology may be used nefariously, such as a tool for criminal harassment or for other unlawful surveillance purposes; that the committee investigate any possible link, formal or informal, between Canadian law enforcement agencies and private technology corporations or start-ups including, but not limited to Clearview AI and Palantir; that the committee examine the impacts of facial recognition technology and the growing power of artificial intelligence.

• (1255)

The Chair: All right, the committee has now heard the motion. It has been distributed in writing, and I hope that an electronic version can be sent to those attending by Zoom. I don't know if they have received that or not.

Have they? It does not appear so.

The motion is in order. It was read into the record and translated, so it is in order.

Go ahead, Mr. Ferguson.

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I'm very conscious of the time and that this is a really important motion. I would just like to indicate that I hope we'll be able to dispense with this business before the end of the meeting.

The Chair: Is there any other discussion on the motion?

Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: The motion is very interesting, but we should consider limiting it to a few meetings, say four meetings. This is a huge topic and I think we should focus on the essence of it.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right, if there is no other discussion—

Perhaps I should be clear. You have posed this motion. Are you moving it now?

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm sorry, I am moving it, and I am happy to ask for unanimous consent for an amendment to it, namely that it be no more than four meetings.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent to amend the motion that Mr. Green has read by adding a maximum of four meetings?

Is anybody opposed?

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Could I just ask one quick question?

The Chair: All right, we're down to about three minutes left, so I'm hoping we can just spend—

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Through you, Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask Mr. Green a question.

Does this study also include the notion of deep fakes?

Mr. Matthew Green: Absolutely. I think that would be included under artificial intelligence.

The Chair: All right, is there unanimous consent to add the four-meeting cap on the study?

Yes?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Sorry, just to clarify, I'm wondering if four meetings would be sufficient to cover the topics that are in here.

The Chair: Okay, I'll take that as a "no" for unanimous consent then, and we'll—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Sorry, I'm not opposing it. I'm just questioning members as to whether they think that would be sufficient, and whether there are maybe one or two more meetings that could be added at the committee's discretion once the study begins.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Villemure, you have the floor.

Mr. René Villemure: I agree with Ms. Khalid. I will propose an amendment to the motion for the number of meetings to be six.

[*English*]

The Chair: If I understand correctly, you're moving that we have six days. If there's no discussion, we will proceed to a vote on the amendment to have six meetings and then proceed to the main motion. Let's see if we can get this done.

Mr. John Brassard: I just have a question on process. I don't think I've ever been involved in a study with more than six meetings.

Through you, Chair, to Mr. Green, where would we...the witnesses? You talked about the Privacy Commissioner. I'm sorry, I had to step out of the room, so you may have mentioned some other people.

The Chair: Mr. Brassard, those are two separate issues. He was going to move that as a separate item, hearing from the officers of Parliament.

Mr. John Brassard: Okay.

The Chair: That's a separate issue.

Mr. John Brassard: Okay, thanks.

I guess my question, Mr. Chair, still is about six meetings. That's a lot of witnesses. It's a lot of meetings. Would six suffice? Would four do the job, Mr. Green? I know we're....

Mr. Matthew Green: I believe that an amending motion is on the floor, and so I'll concede. I said four because that seemed to be what came from my colleague, and now my colleague would like to expand it and make it six. I believe he does have the motion on the floor.

• (1300)

The Chair: All right. All those in favour of the amendment to the motion for a maximum of six meetings?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: The main motion is on the study itself. All those in favour of the main motion?

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

The Chair: Thank you very much, everyone.

With that, I think it is time.

The meeting is adjourned

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