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Chair: Mr. Pat Kelly



Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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• (1105)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting three of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. Today the committee is proceeding to the consideration of matters related to committee business.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation, and in light of the recommendations from health authorities as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19, 2021, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain a two-metre physical distance and must wear a non-medical mask when they are circulating in the room. It is recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when people are seated, but not when they are speaking. I will remove my mask when I'm speaking as chair. It's also required that we maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer provided at the room entrance. I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting and thank members in advance for their co-operation.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. Members may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of either floor, English or French audio. If interpretation is lost, please inform the chair immediately. We will ensure that interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings. The "raise hand" feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak or to alert the chair. For members participating in the room, proceed as you normally would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room.

Keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for mask use and health protocols. Before speaking, wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal. You don't have to hit the switch. Speak slowly and clearly for the benefit of our interpreters. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, both virtually and in the room.

That being said, we are here to discuss committee business. Rising from the last meeting, I will go first to Mr. Villemure, who may wish to move his motion. I will let him go first. We spoke of continuing with that motion at our last meeting.

Go ahead, Mr. Villemure.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

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

I want to acknowledge all my fellow committee members.

I'd like to propose that we continue the discussion on the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are you asking me to read the motion?

Mr. René Villemure: No, I'm asking you just to pursue the discussion.

The Chair: Well, indeed. Do you have anything further to contribute, or would you prefer that I go to others who have their hand up and who perhaps wish to speak to the motion? Do you wish to add anything further?

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: No. I have no further comments.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Khalid, go ahead.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Happy Monday, everyone.

I wanted to check with you, Mr. Chair, on what items we have on the agenda today other than discussion of Monsieur Villemure's motion. Do we have anything planned other than that discussion?

The Chair: I called the meeting for committee business today. We have an outstanding motion that I know some members of the committee wish to have an opportunity to continue. We will proceed with that. If there are other motions, of course, this would be an opportunity to entertain them.

If the committee deals with and disposes of Mr. Villemure's motion, then I will report back on the outcome, from the committee point of view, on witnesses, pursuant to the last motion we adopted.

I will also point out that a work schedule or work plan was distributed to committee members this morning. If we get to it, I would maybe have an opportunity to hear comments from members about just how we proceed in terms of numbers of meetings. I don't want to get into discussing individual witness claims in public at this meeting, but if members desire it, we could move in camera to discuss individual witnesses.

So I think we have a few things we can go on today. We have the minister scheduled to appear on Thursday. I wanted to use this meeting to deal with some of the committee business that we already have in front of us.

If you have no further comments on that, I'll go to Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Actually, Mr. Chair, Ms. Saks was ahead of me.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Greg, I was just taking instruction from the clerk. Can you give that to me again?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Ms. Saks, according to Zoom, had her hand up before me.

The Chair: Thank you. I didn't get the order.

We are now on debate on Mr. Villemure's motion.

Go ahead, Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome all of our colleagues back to the important work of the House.

Referring to Mr. Villemure's motion....

I hear an echoing from the floor audio. If there's a way to mute that, it would be very helpful. Thank you so much.

This is an important discussion that we're having. I'm really looking forward to hearing from the Minister of Health and PHAC officials on Thursday to get down to our core questions with regard to this study and the questions the committee members have put forward.

I need to emphasize, as we discuss Mr. Villemure's motion today, the importance of continuing to collect the data we need to fight COVID-19. Every step of the way, there has been absolute transparency in terms of the collection of the data we receive from Blue-Dot and other service providers. As a matter of fact, the parliamentary secretary for health, Mr. van Koevorden, was kind enough to provide comments and a sample of aggregate data to the committee for review. I'd like to discuss what's in the data that PHAC receives, because we now have for discussion today exactly what officials

are looking at in their request for mobility data from service providers.

When we look at it, we see that it is completely disaggregated, depersonalized data that is set up in sets, whether in regional or even in urban areas. They are looking at week-to-week comparisons of mobility, meaning movement: Where are Canadians going during lockdowns on a week in and week out basis?

• (1115)

They ask very important questions in a comparative way during the reporting weeks of how many people in general are moving from home to work when lockdowns are in place, and then comparing that data in terms of numbers of spread or outbreaks in those areas. They're looking at movement in relation to outbreak and spread, which is really key, especially now with the Omicron virus at hand. We know that the spread is so high.

I feel we need to consider the data that is available. I want to thank the parliamentary secretary, Mr. van Koevorden, for making sure that the committee can weigh in on this data in an effective manner, looking piece by piece, page by page at the statistics with which PHAC is making its evaluations to advise our various ministers of health and COVID teams from coast to coast to coast, province by province and region by region.

When we look at this data, we see that it is secure, as a matter of fact. It's de-identified. It is time-sensitive, looking at four-week or even two-week sets at different times to ensure that we understand how movement relates to outbreaks. As we look at this RFP that is being weighed out and suspensions when we are at the height of a spread, we're looking at various plateaus and reopenings. We have a reopening here in Ontario as of today, as restaurants, gyms and public places start to reopen again.

To hinder the collection of the impact of that... We need to consider the data very carefully. We now know exactly what kind of data is being collected; we have a sample in front of us. Perhaps, rather than putting the cart before the horse, as they say, we should wait to hear from the Minister of Health and PHAC officials on Thursday to ensure that we're making the best decisions and not knee-jerk reactions, while ensuring every step of the way that Canadians are healthy and safe and that their privacy is protected.

From what we've seen recently from the Department of Health and the parliamentary secretary, there's a very clear and concise explanation to have this data that's been collected, what it's being used for, and the importance of it in making wise decisions for the health and safety of Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Saks.

Now we go to Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank my colleague, Adam van Koeverden, for giving all committee members information on the de-identified data used by the Public Health Agency of Canada and the government.

I hope that, in light of this, Mr. Villemure will make some changes to his motion. I personally have some to propose. I hope that my colleague will accept them as friendly amendments. I know that the House of Commons Standing Orders don't say anything about this. However, I'm making these proposals to improve his motion.

[English]

Unfortunately, I've written these amendments to the motion in English. I would be happy to try to do a quick translation and get it over to you.

Mr. Chair, if you'll allow me, I'd like to present these modifications to his motion. May I do so?

• (1120)

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, it's up to the members of the committee to move amendments. If you have an amendment, you're welcome to move it, and it's not necessary for you to—

Hon. Greg Fergus: Seek your approval.

The Chair: You don't need my approval; nor do you need consideration for language. You can orally move a motion in either official language and you're not required to translate it for us.

Go ahead.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I will do so, although I have to say that I try my very best to provide information in both languages. I'm sorry I did not have an opportunity—

The Chair: I'm sorry. I mean that if you were providing it in writing, it would have to be in both official languages, but if you are going to orally make a motion, you may do so, and the excellent interpreters we have here will take care to ensure it's understood by all members.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I will do so, and I will read it. Perhaps I'll read where I'm going to make the changes, and then I'll read it out completely.

For the interpreters and to my colleagues, in taking a look at Monsieur Villemure's motion, following the word “until”, delete the word “it” and add “the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics”.

The second change I'd like to make is, following the word “reports”, to delete the words “its findings and recommendations”.

My final change would be, following the word “House”, to add the words “that it is satisfied that the privacy of Canadians will not be unduly affected”.

Therefore, fellow colleagues, the entire motion would read as follows:

That the Committee call upon the government to suspend the PHAC cellular data tender upon adoption of this motion, and that the tender shall not be reoffered until the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics reports to the House that it is satisfied that the privacy of Canadians will not be unduly affected, and that the Committee report back to the House on the adoption of this motion at the earliest opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus. I believe your amendment is in order. I think I'd like to pause for a moment to ensure that. Let me check with the clerk to ensure we have it down correctly, so that members understand what is being proposed and it can be debated properly.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): Could he send the final text over to me?

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, it appears you have it in writing with you. If you could send that to the clerk, it will assist us. It won't be distributed, being unilingual, but it will help the clerk to ensure that we understand and that the interpreters can make sure all members understand.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I will send that.

Nancy, can you just confirm your email again?

The Clerk: It's ETHI@parl.gc.ca.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I would like to request a written copy of Mr. Fergus's motion, if possible.

The Chair: We are going to do our best to ensure that we first get it to the clerk in English, and we'll see if properly translated versions can be made readily available.

In the meantime, though, the motion is in order, having been delivered orally by Mr. Fergus.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Mr. Chair, I'll obviously wait for the French version.

• (1125)

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Villemure, we're going to endeavour to have live interpretation of the motion by the interpreters as soon as we have it. It may not be possible to send to any member, and there will be nothing that will come from the clerk in writing to all members unless it's fully translated, but we can have live interpretation by the interpreters as soon as that's available.

I'm now going to ask the clerk to read the motion with the proposed amendment by Mr. Fergus, and there will be live interpretation as the clerk reads this. I'm sure the clerk will read this very slowly. If we have to do this more than once, we will.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The motion, with the amendment from Mr. Fergus, in English, reads as follows:

That the Committee call upon the government to suspend the PHAC cellular data tender upon adoption of this motion, and that the tender shall not be reoffered until—

Now as amended:

—the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics reports to the House—

And the text of the amendment here:

—that it is satisfied that the privacy of Canadians will not be unduly affected,—

And back to the regular text of the motion:

—and that the Committee report back to the House on the adoption of this motion at the earliest opportunity.

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Villemure, on the motion, now with the proposed amendment from Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: I can't support the motion until I read it in French. I heard the interpretation, and it seems fine to me. However, these are subtle and significant points. I'm not disagreeing outright, but I'd like to see the written version of the motion.

I want to remind you that we didn't ask that the tender be suspended to undermine the Public Health Agency of Canada, of course. We asked that the tender be suspended until we can confirm some information. We don't want to confirm the agency's stated purpose, which is to protect Canadians from COVID-19. Of course, I agree with that purpose.

However, I find the data collection process unclear, non-transparent, or at least incomplete. This morning, the data obtained by the parliamentary secretary arrived at the last minute. We didn't have time to study it properly. Nevertheless, I repeat that the purpose of the amendment isn't to undermine the agency, but to shed light on a significant issue.

In addition, after the last meeting, it was noted that the tender had been postponed to February 2. It has now been pushed back to February 4, the day after Mr. Duclos' appearance. I don't know whether it's a coincidence, but since we started speaking, the deadline for the tender has changed a few times.

I don't see any harm. However, I want to make sure that we have the opportunity to shed light on this and to get our report and recommendations to the House as soon as possible.

I'm bothered by the fact that the motion read out referred to reporting to the House. However, I didn't hear anything about recommendations, at least in the French version. That's why I want to read the motion in French. I want to be sure of the vote's purpose. This isn't about filibustering in any way, but rather about shedding light on the issue.

• (1130)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Villemure.

I'm going to pause before I go to Ms. Khalid, and ask the clerk if we might have an estimate on how long it may take to be able to distribute that.

The Clerk: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: I'll go to Ms. Khalid now.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Talking on the amendments, my personal preference would have been that we heard from the minister and from the Public Health Agency of Canada officials before really going

into a deep dive into this motion and before making a final decision.

In terms of the amendments here, I see them as just adding more clarity. This is just a cleanup of the language, but the substance of what Mr. Villemure is asking is maintained.

I understand and respect how important that translation is in terms of how we understand and how we move forward as a committee. I would perhaps ask the committee, and I would love to hear the committee's viewpoints, especially Monsieur Villemure's, as to whether he feels we should delay this until we hear from the health minister and the officials, to see exactly how they can help us in what we are trying to achieve. I absolutely believe that Monsieur Villemure's intentions are very noble and that he is trying to do the right thing.

I feel that perhaps if we were guided by learning from the experts, the health officials and the minister, we could do better justice to what Monsieur Villemure is trying to achieve through this motion.

I put that out there, but I will just reiterate that in my opinion the amendments themselves just provide more clarity to the language of the main motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Hepfner.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): I also want to lend support to my colleague, Ms. Khalid.

Here's my concern. This is valuable data that public health is using to help manage the pandemic. I point to the letter from Adam van Koeverden, the parliamentary secretary for health, which he sent to committee members this morning.

He says that if the request for proposals is delayed, PHAC will lose access to this data as of March 20, 2022. He has given us very clear information that is being collected and distributed and opened to Canadians every week. We can see that it is disaggregated data that's not linked to any one particular person.

He goes on to say that this data will be used only for the purposes set out in the RFP. This is data that's being used for risk assessments, research to understand the value of mobility data in detecting future risk of infectious diseases, and weekly insights for provinces and territories to assist them in their public health response, as well as to keep Canadians informed about the COVID trends website and the WeatherCAN application.

I think these are important points. We have to make sure that Canadians' data is being protected and their privacy is being protected, but I just don't want us, in a knee-jerk reaction, to take away important tools that public health is using to manage the pandemic.

I just wanted to add those thoughts.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hepfner.

Before I go to Mr. Fergus, I understand that the amendment has now been circulated in writing in both official languages.

Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the clerk and all the people who were involved in the translation.

I want to apologize to my honourable colleague Mr. Villemure for not having prepared this document in both official languages. This is a failure on my part and I won't make the same mistake in the future.

You have all seen the amendments that the clerk emailed to us. You can see that, as Ms. Khalid and Ms. Hepfner said, I'm just trying to clarify Mr. Villemure's motion, not change it.

I want to specifically echo what he just said. He doesn't want to oppose anything merely on principle. He wants to get to the bottom of things. Once he's satisfied that the data is de-identified, the committee should move on.

I move that the tender not be re-offered until the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics reports to the House that it's satisfied that the privacy of Canadians won't be unduly affected, and that the committee report its findings to the House, and so on.

My goal is to clarify Mr. Villemure's intentions, which I believe represent the consensus of all committee members.

I want to hear my colleague's thoughts. I don't want to take any more time. I hope that he'll find that my remarks align with his intentions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Villemure, you are next.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Fergus, thank you for your apology. It isn't a problem.

I'm pleased that the clerk's team was able to translate the motion quickly.

As I said earlier, Ms. Khalid, I'm obviously not against obtaining the data, or protecting the public. I gather that the amendment is meant to clarify the motion, not to make a major change.

However, I see that the word "recommendation" is missing in the new version. It talks about reporting, but not about making recommendations. This is probably an oversight on the part of my honourable colleague.

I also want to make a distinction. Initially, we were talking about suspending the tender for obtaining the data. In this case, we're talking about a data tender. It's likely the same thing, but I would

strongly suggest that we add the words "obtaining" and "recommendation". I think that this will put us on the same page.

If those words can be included in the motion, I think that this will align with the spirit of the motion. We'll see. I'd certainly like some clarification with regard to "unduly affected". In my view, this judgment is sometimes very personal. I'm sure that our honourable colleague can clarify the meaning of "unduly affected".

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

Mr. Brassard is next, followed by Ms. Khalid.

• (1140)

Mr. John Brassard: On the amendment, I would agree with Mr. Villemure's assessment on some of the language that needs to be couched.

I'm looking at the amendment right now. Perhaps Mr. Fergus would consider importing Mr. Villemure's words of recommendation. The ultimate goal of what Mr. Villemure is proposing is that this committee be able to be satisfied that the privacy data of 33 million Canadians, which was collected without their knowledge, is protected, and that the proper security protocols and security measures are put in place. That's really the crux of what we're trying to accomplish here in this study.

As I mentioned in previous meetings, this wasn't known until this RFP, which would have expanded this program, was actually instituted or called for. Since then, since this RFP was put out, security experts, surveillance experts and privacy experts have universally been exposing cause for concern, so I won't be satisfied until I'm absolutely 100% certain that this information was disaggregated and depersonalized.

I'm sorry for being a skeptic, Mr. Chair, but I'm not going to take the government's word for it. I'm not going to take the Minister of Health's word for it. We proposed this study so that we could call in the companies that were collecting this data and so that we could call in the security and surveillance experts.

Over the course of the last couple of weeks, I have done a deep dive into this, and there are legitimate reasons to be concerned from a security standpoint, so I think that what Mr. Villemure proposes is a prudent move on the part of the committee.

I know there has been some mention of what Mr. van Koevorden sent out. I find it awfully curious that 45 minutes before this committee meeting started, we got a letter from the parliamentary secretary, saying everything was okay with our using this data.

I agree with Mr. Villemure and I think my colleagues on this side agree as well that we want the best results from a public health standpoint, but we also need to be bloody well assured that the privacy rights of Canadians are being protected. Until and unless we get to the point where we're satisfied, it is of concern to many Canadians, at least judging from the reactions I have received over the last couple of weeks, that their mobility data was being collected without their knowledge.

I will also note that in this BlueDot reference.... I've had to borrow Mr. Kurek's iPad here because I really needed to blow it up a bit more so I could see what these data sources are. For anybody who reads the appendix to this, it should actually not give them any satisfaction that their privacy and data were protected. It should give reasons for concern.

I want to be able to discuss with these privacy and security experts what the risk is to the privacy data of Canadians. I think it's prudent for us to send a message to the government that this RFP needs to be delayed.

Mr. Fergus is reaching the spirit of what Mr. Villemure is proposing, but we cannot have this privacy data collected until we are absolutely sure—and most important, until Canadians can be assured—that this privacy data is being protected in the proper way, with the proper security protocols and the proper security measures.

Just on the amendment, I think we are getting close to where we need to be on this, but we had better be sure.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brassard.

Now we have Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Just to pick up on something that Monsieur Brassard said, I didn't see an appendix to this document at all, so I'm not really sure what he's referring to. Maybe I missed a piece here and there, but having reviewed this document, I see how that aggregated data is being used to really differentiate how people have been impacted by COVID.

Going back to the amendment and Monsieur Villemure's points, when Mr. Villemure presented his main motion, it was after a long and healthy discussion of a motion that had been presented by Monsieur Brassard. Here's what I find to be a little unclear, and perhaps Monsieur Villemure can clarify this for us. When we were discussing the full-on study, which we all agreed to and for which we will hopefully be getting to the witness list and study plans later on today, why was this motion not included, perhaps as part of that initial motion that we met on a 106(4) for? Based on that and my deduction and reasoning, the wording of Monsieur Villemure's motion talks about a report and findings and recommendations, and I'm not sure if we're trying to duplicate the work of the initial study, because it seems that there's a huge overlap between what we've already agreed to study and Monsieur Villemure's motion.

My interpretation of Monsieur Fergus's amendment is that it is really to provide that clarity, to say, okay, we have that study going on, but in the meantime, if we're going to suspend an RFP, then the way to see it to conclusion is to say, okay, the committee's satisfied or the committee's not satisfied. That satisfaction comes from the basis of what is going to be our long and healthy study into this whole issue.

I'm really hoping Monsieur Villemure can provide some clarification around what is the difference between the two. If we're talking about suspending RFPs while we're conducting this study, then for me the language as proposed by Mr. Fergus makes that so much more clear. If we're going back to the language of the main motion, then all we're talking about is that we're not specifying what report and what recommendations. We're just talking, in my interpretation, about what was the motion that was discussed and passed, and this seems to be an addendum, but it's a completely separate thing.

I again encourage members. Perhaps we do need to wait to hear from the health minister, from public health officials, to say we're going to have some clarity around what exactly the scope of the issue is and then come back to this motion. Alternatively, as members see fit, I think the language proposed by Mr. Fergus makes it more distinct and clear on the specific issue that Mr. Villemure has raised on his main motion, which is separate and distinct from a study we've already agreed to do.

We had a very long and healthy discussion among members about the importance of privacy and the importance of protection of data, and how we're all willing to go forward and embark on this study to ensure Canadians are protected. I turn to you, Monsieur Villemure, through the chair. Perhaps you can provide some clarity as to what that distinction is between this motion and the motion we've discussed before and these amendments.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

Now we have Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to acknowledge Mr. Villemure's openness to considering my proposed amendments.

There's a difference between recommendations and the committee's satisfaction. If it isn't appropriate, we'll express our disagreement with the government's actions. I'm asking that we find a way to address the significant concerns raised in Mr. Villemure's motion. If I understood Mr. Brassard correctly, these concerns are shared by all committee members.

If the committee is satisfied that the data is de-identified and that there isn't any impact on the personal data of Canadians, it should say so. We don't want to dwell on the review of the report. If we're satisfied, we should say so in the House of Commons. However, it goes both ways. If we aren't satisfied, we won't give our approval. That way, the government won't need to return to work on the issue.

Mr. Villemure is a philosopher and an ethics specialist. Could he explain the difference between... I don't see any difference between our proposals. My proposed amendment says that the committee needs the House of Commons' approval or non-approval to determine what will be done.

I hope that the committee is satisfied with my proposal. I'm making it in good faith so that the work can move forward in an efficient manner.

• (1150)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Now we have Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I want to add to the discussion. We have other business we need to get to today. I'm really hoping we can find a collaborative way to get a clear direction forward so we can dig into the deep questions we need to on Thursday with the minister and with the experts, but also so that we can be satisfied with the current work being done to keep public health and safety and privacy issues for Canadians working hard as we move through the pandemic. It's a delicate balance we're in right now, with tremendous responsibility.

I'd like to refer back to the comments of my colleague Mr. Brassard. I'd like to turn to the data sample all of us have in front of us, which explicitly outlines what the data sources are in terms of disaggregated, anonymized mobile devices. It is very clear actually. BlueDot explains that it leverages anonymized population aggregated near-real-time mobile device location data to estimate dynamic changes in population mobility patterns, meaning not one person but many people across the country. The data used contains only unique device ID, and there is no information pertaining to users themselves.

I think this is a very important point. They've developed internal policies, on top of the privacy standards, to limit the access to these data and to create guardrails to safeguard the privacy of users. All analytics at the device level are rolled up into population-level units, which is how they're able to track the risks in relation to spread. This data is also related to geography and time periods containing fewer than five devices at a time. If there are more than that.... They're trying to suppress the individual data at every step along the way. I really think comments saying that there is universal concern about this and that there's a lack of transparency.... PHAC has published; there have been articles in the media—we discussed this in our previous meeting—and there has been an open discussion throughout the pandemic regarding how we use data in a responsible, private and safe way, such that it is disaggregated and anonymized, to ensure that we have the best real-time information on how best to protect Canadians as they wish to move across the country, whether it's for business or personal reasons, whether or not it's safe for them to go from region to region or area to area.

We want to make sure that, as we go into this deep dive with officials and with the minister, we are also recognizing the real-time safety concerns of Canadians. We want to do our work efficiently, both here in committee and in the House, and make sure the will of the committee is heard.

Other colleagues, such as Mr. Green, have other concerns that we need to put on the committee table. We need to get to the crux of this, of what will satisfy the committee with regard to the concerns that Mr. Villemure has raised, so that we can move forward.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to go to Mr. Green next. I can't always get the precise order. I had Mr. Green down first.

It's Mr. Green and then Mr. Villemure.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): I'm sure you can appreciate that I've been listening intently to all the interventions, and I have to say that I'm always amused at the suggestion that we rush on to other important points of work when the government side, I have to share, has been speaking for the majority of the time to this point.

I don't think the subamendment and the amendment are complicated. In fact, I think the idea of putting a pause on procurement while we wait to hear from the ministers in a lexical order makes sense. We would pause the procurement, we would do the study, we would listen to the experts and then we would form an opinion. To try to have them run together.... I'll note that had this not been flagged on whatever it was—Christmas Eve—and had we not had that emergency intervention, I believe there's a likelihood that the procurement would have gone forward without any scrutiny.

When I hear words like “anonymized”, I have to think that at some point in time the data is not anonymous. Rolling up information, I would suggest that, at points of the interception of this information, it is individualized. When I hear phrases like “trying to suppress [the] individual data”, I'm also.... These are all things that I think further my concerns. For me, I just want it to go on the record that my biggest concern overall, perhaps, is the commodification of personal information. It's not just about the processes through which we've gotten to this point, but the way in which we've allowed private corporations in the telecom cartel to take information that ought to be private and sell it. In this case it's sold to the government in this way, but there's a whole host of other ways in which private information is being bought and sold as a commodity, which I have a significant interest in.

I would agree. I don't think there's anything untoward about Mr. Fergus's subamendment. It states, as I understand it, that it is to the resolution of our committee work. To me, it feels a bit redundant to where Mr. Villemure's original amendment was, but I support both. I would just go on the record to state that I hope, given the feedback around the table of wanting to move forward on this work, this isn't something that we end up sitting through in a filibuster just to kind of grind it out, rather than moving forward on it. Hopefully, we'll get to a vote ASAP, and then we can get on to other business.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Now I have Monsieur Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

I completely agree with Mr. Green on the data issue.

I want to talk about what the Public Health Agency of Canada gave us this morning, which Ms. Hepfner referred to. I have no trouble believing that this data is useful for public health. However, we're wondering not only about the process, but also about the fact that the data can be personalized before being anonymized.

I'll go back to the redundancy issue regarding the two amendments. As the saying goes, "whoever can do more can do less." One is subordinate to the other and there's some overlap.

Personally, I didn't have time to carefully read the document that we received this morning, with 45 minutes' notice, from the parliamentary secretary. This bothers me. I hope that this practice won't be adopted for all documents sent out in the future.

Nevertheless, I'm still concerned about the use of the words "unduly affected" because the meaning is broad. In general, it's important to move forward. I would suggest adding the word "recommendations" to the motion, and removing or defining the words "unduly affected", which are quite subjective, unless we agree on a definition.

Believe me, I'm not filibustering. Since coming to Parliament, I've learned about the need for clarity. That's what I'm trying to add. I appreciate Mr. Ferguson's amendment, which I don't think conflicts with my motion. It tries to add details and clarity. I'm just proposing to clarify what Mr. Ferguson is trying to clarify.

• (1200)

[*English*]

The Chair: Before I go to the next speaker, Mr. Villemure, you've spoken about some possible changes, but I don't have a formal subamendment from you. If it is or was your intent to formulate something specific to be voted upon, I would invite you to do so. If not, we'll continue with the discussion on the amendment to the motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: You'll have it in two minutes, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: It's being written.

[*English*]

The Chair: In the meantime, I'm going to continue debate on the amendment and go to Mr. Kurek, who is in the room.

Go ahead, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As has often become the case, I think, you have the members from the governing party who are quick to say that there's impor-

tant work that needs to be accomplished, yet they seem to be the ones taking up the lion's share of the discussion.

Mr. Chair, I'll keep my comments very brief, and I hope we can then in short order get to a vote on both the amendment and the motion.

I certainly feel that it's important to press "pause" to ensure that Canadians can have confidence in their government and that their privacy is being respected. I appreciate the fact that Ms. Saks read into the record the appendix from some of the information that was shared with this committee this morning. I saw the letter from Mr. van Koeverden, and I had a chance to briefly go through the information from BlueDot. I have far more questions today than I did an hour before this meeting when preparing for further discussion. I think the fact that there's a private corporation that's been brought into the mix here simply begs more questions than there are answers.

Ms. Saks read in some of the information about how the data was handled. That's all fine and well, but I would encourage Ms. Saks and all members of this committee to chat with their constituents and see how they feel about their information being used in the way that she read into the record, and that has been outlined in the slide deck presented to us by the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Chair, I would simply say this: Canadians deserve answers on this. Certainly, I think it is only fair and right in the spirit of good governance and collaboration on this committee to simply say, "Let's pause this procurement," so that Canadians can in fact have confidence at a time when there has been, certainly from what I'm hearing, an erosion of trust that has much to do with government, whether related to COVID response or otherwise.

I would encourage this committee to move forward. Let's get to the important work that has to be done. The Liberals seem to say that, and now is their opportunity to demonstrate it.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now hear from Mr. Ferguson.

[*Translation*]

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

First, I want to tell Mr. Kurek that the door is already open. Everyone agrees that we should put this on hold. I don't understand why he keeps insisting that there's opposition or claiming that there's a straw man. Everyone agrees on this.

Second, I propose that we take a break while we wait for the text of Mr. Villemure's subamendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ferguson, did you want to get back in? Otherwise, I have no speakers.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I thought that we were waiting for Mr. Villemure's subamendment. Is that right?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm informed by the clerk that we have written text.

Monsieur Villemure, you will need to formally make the motion for the subamendment. We've received the text of it, so I will call upon you to get into the record the subamendment that you wish to propose.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Mr. Chair, you're lucky to have the text of the subamendment. I personally haven't received it yet. Please wait a moment.

[*English*]

The Chair: I understand that it comes from you. You're going to have to—

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Right now, I have the French version, of course.

But there are two little things that—

[*English*]

The Chair: That's—

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: First, I propose that the word “unduly” be removed.

I also propose that we add “that the committee make recommendations”, which was there initially and which was removed. That's all.

[*English*]

The Chair: If I understand you correctly, and I don't see it in writing, your amendment is to delete the word “unduly” and replace it with...

Mr. René Villemure: I would delete “unduly”. There's no replacement.

The Chair: That's all we're doing. That's the entire subamendment.

Mr. René Villemure: There is also the addition of one word. The committee reports back to the House

[*Translation*]

“—with recommendations on the adoption of this motion.”

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

The subamendment is in order. We now have a subamendment, the amendment and the main motion. I have debate now continuing on the addition of the subamendment.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: From my understanding, there are two changes with the amendments and the subamendment proposed. If you don't mind, Mr. Chair, for clarity I'd like to read the whole thing as proposed by Mr. Villemure, so that members and I can understand it. It would read as follows:

That the committee call upon the government to suspend the PHAC cellular data tender upon adoption of this motion, and that the tender shall not be re-offered until the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics reports to the House that it is satisfied that the privacy of Canadians will not be affected, and that the committee report back to the House with recommendations on the adoption of this motion at the earliest opportunity.

Did I read that properly?

The Chair: Yes. Give me one moment.

I understand that we have it correctly. I will allow the clerk to address your question.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Villemure.

I want to make sure that I understand. Based on your suggestions and the French document that I received, we would remove the word “duly”.

Mr. René Villemure: The word “unduly”.

The Clerk: Pardon me. We would remove the word “unduly” and leave only the word “affected”. According to the document sent to me, we would write “and that the committee make recommendations to the House on the adoption of this motion”.

Mr. René Villemure: That is not quite right.

The Clerk: That is what I received.

• (1210)

Mr. René Villemure: I know, I just saw it too.

I am basically getting back to the initial motion, in other words, “that the Committee report back to the House on the adoption”. No, sorry, I will do it over: “reports its findings and recommendations”. As the motion is currently worded, the idea of a report is there but not of recommendations.

The Clerk: So, if I may, in the case of this kind of a motion, a report to the House would be just a report on the adoption of this motion.

Mr. René Villemure: That is what was unfortunately written in the motion sent to you.

I would like the committee to submit its report and its recommendations to the House.

The Clerk: Okay.

I just need a moment to speak to the chair.

Mr. René Villemure: Okay.

[*English*]

The Chair: Just to have a little more clarity around what this motion would do, it doesn't contain a study. It simply makes a recommendation, so there really wouldn't be any recommendations to report other than the motion itself, which would be that the committee moves and recommends the suspension of the tender. There wouldn't be other recommendations that would need to go with it. We would merely report to the House that the committee has passed this motion, if it does, to suspend the tender.

Does that help you, Monsieur Villemure?

I'm just clarifying the issue of reporting, and what we would report to the House. The committee would simply report to the House that this motion has been adopted, because this motion doesn't call for a study that would then create a report that would contain recommendations. This motion would be reported on its own.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Mr. Chair, I would like to say something.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Villemure, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: That is not the case. I apologize to my colleagues about the lack of clarity or coordination. The original motion states, “until [the Committee] reports its findings and recommendations to the House”. That is the missing sentence.

Mr. Fergus's motion talks about reporting to the House, but it does not mention reporting and making recommendations to the House. The recommendations that were in the original motion are not included in the amendment. I don't want to waste everyone's time, but that part of the sentence was removed, and I want members to be aware of that removal's impact.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will continue the discussion on the subamendment. I have Ms. Khalid first, and then I have Mr. Fergus as well.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: My apologies for just trying to seek clarification. I know some of our colleagues are perhaps getting a little antsy with the elongated debate, but obviously we take our motions and the work we do in our committee very seriously to ensure we're doing it properly.

I have a couple of questions around clarification. When we remove the word “unduly” to say that the House is satisfied that the privacy of Canadians will not be unduly affected, are we talking about specifically the company that will receive this RFP, or are we talking about, in general, all privacy concerns that Canadians may have?

Mr. Chair, I think you did a really good job clarifying the issues about recommendations and reporting back to the House. My understanding is that the way Mr. Fergus drafted his amendment, it made it very clear what was expected of the committee, whether we're satisfied or not satisfied.

When we start talking about recommendations, for me after my six years here in the House—compared to many more tenured and more senior folks in our Parliament—it seems that when we're talking about recommendations, we're also talking about a report, a study, which is not mentioned at all in this motion.

Please forgive me for being a bit confused. I'm just trying to find some clarity as to what exactly we're trying to do with this motion, and to narrow the scope of it a bit, because I find the language to be a little on the vague side.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we will go to Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: I will be brief, Mr. Chair. I would like to put a question to you. Is the objective of the motion to carry out a study or to make recommendations to the House of Commons? Could you get clarifications on that from the clerk please?

[*English*]

The Chair: This committee indeed already passed a motion to study the issue of data collection. This motion itself does not create a new study.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: That is what I wanted to clarify. I proposed amendments to clarify Mr. Villemure's motion.

We are talking about his motion. Mr. Chair, I once again ask that you clarify whether Mr. Villemure's motion implies that the committee would conduct a second study.

Is it rather a matter of giving our approval or not, of making recommendations to the House of Commons and of indicating whether the committee is satisfied or not?

I agree with removing the word “unduly”, but I would just like you to clarify this, Mr. Chair.

Once again, I thank you for your consideration.

[*English*]

The Chair: The comments from members are going increasingly toward statements of clarification from the chair, so I'm going to suspend for a moment and confer with the clerk.

• (1215)

(Pause)

• (1225)

The Chair: The meeting is back in session.

I understand that the question I'm being asked to answer is really what exactly Monsieur Villemure means by the addition of the words “with recommendations”. Rather than trying to sort this out myself, I'm going to allow debate to resume, and perhaps Monsieur Villemure can inform the committee.

I will point out that neither the motion that was initially made nor Mr. Fergus's amendment would provide any forum for study with recommendations. There is a separate study taking place, which will run the course of hearing witnesses, drafting a report and making recommendations to the House. I understand that the intent of Monsieur Villemure's motion is simply, at the earliest point, to recommend to the House of Commons that it not proceed with the tender until the committee has done its study.

With that, I'll invite Monsieur Villemure to speak to the subamendment that has been made. If there are no other speakers following that, we may vote on it, but I'll go ahead with Monsieur Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

I will be very brief and will try to be very clear.

I have no objection to removing the word “unduly” and leaving Mr. Fergus's motion as it was. The study will be carried out anyway. So I completely agree.

[*English*]

The Chair: With the amendment having been accepted with the other part, I'm happy, if it's the will of the committee, to allow the subamendment to read exactly as Monsieur Villemure suggested, by making only that one single change. That gets us away from the problem of figuring out what is meant by the other portion. Unless I see objections, that will be the subamendment. If there are no other speakers on it, we can start to come to a vote.

I see no objection to what Monsieur Villemure has proposed, so the subamendment would be deleting the word “unduly”. That would amend Mr. Fergus' motion.

(Subamendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now we go to Mr. Fergus's amendment to the main motion.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now we go to Monsieur Villemure's main motion as amended by both Mr. Fergus and the subamendment by Monsieur Villemure.

In the room here there is a request for a recorded vote on the motion.

• (1230)

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: The vote is on the motion as amended.

[*English*]

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Clerk, and thank you to committee members.

We still have some time left for additional committee business. I'm going to begin by reporting back to committee.

Mr. Fergus, if you'll permit me, I'll just deal with reporting back the results that came about from the motion adopted at the last meeting and then I'll take speakers. I see your hand up, and I also have Mr. Brassard, who is in the room.

I wish to report back that, pursuant to the motion adopted at the last meeting, we asked to call both Minister Duclos and the chief public health officer of Canada, Theresa Tam. Dr. Tam declined the invitation through the department, which is why she does not appear in the notice of meeting that came out on Thursday. That invitation was declined.

Minister Duclos accepted. I did my best to try to schedule a meeting at the earliest possible time that he could reasonably appear. That was not until this Thursday, but I did what I could, pursuant to what I had said at committee in response to Mr. Brassard's request to arrange that as soon as possible.

That is where we are. A draft work plan has been circulated to committee members, which contains possible witnesses. I don't want to discuss that because it deals with private individuals and it's not the custom of committee to discuss that business in public, although we are certainly able to talk about our schedule in terms of how many meetings we have. The work plan suggests the next six meetings to hear witnesses on this important study.

With that, I will go to Mr. Fergus and then Mr. Brassard.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

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

Concerning the same point of order, I would like to move a new motion on establishing upcoming studies, since a study is underway on the Public Health Agency of Canada or, to be more precise, on the study proposed by Mr. Brassard, which we are currently considering and for which we will hear testimony later this week.

I would also like to discuss Mr. Green's motion to study the potential use of facial recognition technology.

Mr. Chair, we have also talked about inviting the four officers—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll have to stop you there, Mr. Fergus. Interpretation hasn't been.... We didn't catch all of that.

We may also be having some technical issues. Your volume is quite low. Could you bear with us for one moment while we ensure that everything is working all right?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Okay.

[*English*]

The Chair: We had some interference that was only within the room here.

Mr. Fergus, I did not catch your motion in translation. Could I ask you to repeat that portion of your intervention before you continue?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: It would be my pleasure, Mr. Chair.

I am proposing a three-part motion concerning the committee's upcoming regularly scheduled meetings.

In order to seize this opportunity and take into account your recent statements, I would first like us to continue the study proposed by my colleague Mr. Brassard. I would then like us to undertake the study proposed by Mr. Green, and to invite the four officers of Parliament.

If I may, I will submit to the clerk the following motion in both official languages, and I will read it to you:

That the following regularly scheduled meetings of the committee be programmed as follows:

1. That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), the committee conduct the study proposed by Mr. Brassard and adopted on the Public Health Agency of Canada collecting, using or possessing Canadians' private cellphone data, that the committee make recommendations; and that the committee report its findings to the House no later than April 16th;

2. That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h)(vii), the committee conduct the study proposed by Mr. Green and adopted to 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 make recommendations; and that the committee report its findings to the House no later than May 28th;

3. That the committee invite the 4 officers of Parliament who report to this committee for no fewer than 2 hours each to present their work to our committee and to review the Estimates no later than June 17th.

Mr. Chair, thank you for your patience. I will send to the clerk my motion in both official languages shortly.

• (1240)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

The motion is in order.

For discussion I have Mr. Brassard. He will be followed by Mr. Green.

Mr. John Brassard: I guess my immediate concern in relation to what Mr. Fergus is proposing is that it's basically that we program the committee on a timeline, and that, if I'm hearing the motion correctly—because I haven't seen it at this point—this study would provide recommendations to Parliament by April 16. Mr. Green's study would be by May 28, and then the four parliamentary officers would be by June 17.

We have submitted a pretty robust list of witnesses for this particular study, not the least of them being the Privacy Commissioner, as well as privacy and security experts and telecommunications companies. Also, of course, we have the minister coming on Thursday.

The immediate concern I would have on this, frankly, is that I don't think we're going to have enough time, given the parliamentary schedule the way it is, to really do a deep dive into this and address the concerns Canadians have. The challenge is that it may take a few meetings to come up with recommendations for this study as we draft a report.

If we work backwards, I guess what I would ask is.... I'm curious as to how many meetings would in fact be able to take place for this study. Are we reducing it? I don't even know what that number might be if we are to provide that report, because I don't have the parliamentary schedule in front of me.

That would be my immediate concern, Mr. Chair. I don't want to limit or preclude the number of witnesses we can have, because I think this is a very important study, and it has many Canadians concerned as well. There are a lot of witnesses on that list that it would be prudent for all of us to get to in order to really have a fulsome discussion on this.

Mr. Chair, I see you nodding your head. Perhaps you have an answer for me as to how many meetings would take place.

The Chair: In the interest of being clear for everyone around that, and for other members who may share that question, I count 13 scheduled meetings between now and April 16. We have 13 scheduled meetings before April 16, and if we use all of those meetings for this study, it would start to get tight for the other items. There would be seven or eight meetings before May 28 and then a number before June 17.

We do have a lot of meetings on the calendar between now and the end of June, but you raise a good point around just making sure that we understand the calendar as we contemplate Mr. Fergus's motion.

With that, I will go next to Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: I appreciate our digging into the schedule and trying to get a sense for what our legislative priorities are going to be over the next few weeks and months.

I have to say, though, that I have a deep concern I want to voice. The chief public health officer has turned down our invitation to come before this committee. I can't let that go unnoticed. Committees are supposed to be masters of their own domain. They're quasi-judicial. They have, I would say, significant legislative authority to have people come before committee. I can appreciate schedules being tight. I can appreciate the chief public health officer not having the schedule availability in these next couple of weeks to come, but to simply refuse to show up before the committee is a problem for me. I want to state that on the record today. If it is going to be a characteristic of this government or of the senior bureaucrats of this government to refuse to come before the committee, we're going to be headed toward a bit of a problem here and on a slippery slope.

I'm sure people are going to have lots to say about this. It is what it is. She refused to come before committee. That's not a small thing. I'm not suggesting that we subpoena the chief public health officer to appear before this committee, but I want to remind members of this committee that we do have the power within our quasi-judicial capacity to do that. I hope it doesn't become a pattern with this committee that people say, "No, I'd rather not go."

I want to put that out there. I hope that, working through whatever channels we can on the government side, more care and consideration are given to the seriousness of the requests that are put before our government departments, particularly the most senior officers of those government departments.

Having said all of that, I look forward to getting into these studies and hopefully being able to provide some value to Canadians on these very important topics.

I also want to note that if there's a possibility, sooner rather than later, in the order as written.... I still think there's incredible value in having the four officers of Parliament who report to this committee present themselves—even if it's an hour earlier, rather than later—to update us on their past work and where they are. I'm concerned that if we wait until June, we might find a space where we've narrowed our focus so much that we haven't been able to take a step back and see exactly what's happening out there from the four officers of Parliament.

Those are my contributions. I look forward to hearing from others.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Now we have Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Really quickly, we're having a debate on Mr. Fergus's motion and not on the witnesses and the meeting plan for our proposed study coming up. I would say that I prefer having that finality and understanding that this is what our plan looks like over the next couple of weeks and months and this is how we're going to conduct ourselves. It gives me time to prepare and understand the issue in a more significant way.

Members, keep in mind that these meetings are about not just hearing from witnesses, but also reviewing draft reports and finalizing our recommendations. Given the robust nature of our discussions, I feel that we would have really good discussions in finalizing those reports.

Having said that, I would love to hear from other members to see if they have other proposed dates, meeting times or study time periods with which they want to amend this motion. All in all, having that finality and those deadlines, for me, creates a very solid study plan and gives us that motivation to say this is what we've got on the agenda and this is what we're going to get done over the next six months. Let's go ahead and get it done.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

Next I have Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: I wasn't going to speak on this, but given Mr. Fergus's motion and the fact that it relates to the study and recommendations being due on April 16, and Mr. Green's comments about Dr. Tam not appearing before this committee, as you stated before, I will tell you that I'm extremely disappointed in the fact that Dr. Tam is not coming to this committee. I'll tell you why.

Earlier, when we were discussing motions, comments were made by our colleagues on the Liberal side about the importance of being precise. Motions need to be taken very seriously. I wrote those

comments down because, if we truly believe that motions are to be taken seriously and need to be precise, Dr. Tam should be coming here. When we introduced the motion in a prior meeting, it was agreed on a vote of 10-0, Mr. Chair, that we were going to have Dr. Tam come to committee to discuss the collection of Canadians' mobility data and what purpose was being served.

There's only one person who can answer that, and it's the person responsible for the public health response to this emergency. I think it was very important for Dr. Tam to come and tell us why this information and data were important. I know we have the minister coming on Thursday, but the motion was clear and unequivocal. It stated that both were to appear.

The committee has an authority of its own. We can, if we choose, compel Dr. Tam to come. I can tell you that I'm very disappointed that we are not going to hear from Dr. Tam as to why this data was collected secretly from 33 million Canadians to determine public health response. This also relates to the RFP. Publicly, the Public Health Agency of Canada has stated that the RFP was to determine the response to the pandemic—in particular lockdown effectiveness—but also the public health response and measures going forward. Who better to answer those questions than the chief public health officer of this country?

To say that I'm disappointed.... I share Mr. Green's disappointment, as well, that Dr. Tam is not coming to this committee after we voted 10-0 to have her come. I understand she's busy. I understand that we're still at the height of a critical point in this pandemic, but she should take the time for an hour to come to committee and answer these very relevant questions, not the least of which is, what other public health data is available to the Public Health Agency of Canada so it doesn't have to spy on Canadians' mobility data? That data is collected by PHAC, municipal and provincial public health agencies, and territorial health agencies. Hospitalization data is collected as well. That can all be used to determine what a public health response is going to be, so why was this done in secret?

The only person who can answer that question is the chief public health officer of Canada. I'm disappointed, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, that she's not coming to this committee after we voted 10-0. Even the Liberal members voted to have her come to this committee, and she's not coming.

• (1250)

The Chair: Next, we have Monsieur Villemure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: In the same spirit as what Mr. Brassard said, it is not impossible to invite Dr. Tam again. The committee can still decide to do so.

That said, my comments mainly concern Mr. Fergus's motion.

The idea of having a guide for what we intend to do during this session is excellent. However, I don't think we should adhere to absolute dates. Although the idea of a guide is a good one, I would be more comfortable with setting tentative dates rather than final ones.

In addition, as Mr. Brassard was saying, our study could be fairly lengthy. I don't have enough committee experience to know how much time a study should take. That is why I am in favour of a tentative date and of an objective instead of a set date that cannot be pushed back. However, I would be completely in favour of trying to keep the objective, which does not seem unreasonable to me.

[*English*]

The Chair: Before I go to Mr. Fergus, I will point out that when it comes to the actual deadline to table a report in the House, we have to take into consideration the time necessary and the availability of the analysts. It is helpful, just in managing the analysts' time, to have at least a little flexibility.

With that, I will go to Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to respond to the comments made by Mr. Villemure, Mr. Brassard and Mr. Green.

The objective of my proposal is for us to establish a roadmap for the upcoming studies. Mr. Chair, you answered Mr. Brassard, concerning his study we will soon begin, that there were 16 meetings between now and the date I proposed. I hope that Mr. Brassard will be convinced of my good faith and my intention to give us enough time to carry out this study properly.

Mr. Chair, before I moved this motion, you said we would dedicate five or six meetings to the study proposed by Mr. Brassard. But I propose that we dedicate up to 16 meetings to that study. So I hope he will be reassured that I in no way want to restrict the committee's work unreasonably. The same goes for the other studies and for the appearance of the four officers of Parliament.

To answer Mr. Green's question, if the officers of Parliament are available to appear before June, they will be welcome to. I am just saying that they should be invited by June at the latest. We know that they have to appear, so we should get organized based on our witnesses' availability for certain studies and invite them when it suits us. That is my motion's objective.

The most important part of all this is that, since January 2019, we have been trying to carry out a study on facial recognition. Everyone is saying that this is important, critical, and even paramount, but we have put it off indefinitely for all sorts of reasons.

By clearly establishing our roadmap for this session, we could finally address this important issue, which disproportionately affects visible minority Canadians.

Two years ago, Radio-Canada reported on this issue with members of the National Assembly. At the time, this kind of a study was already desperately needed. So I think we should conduct this study now. I hope everyone will agree that I am proposing to dedicate a lot of time to these two studies and to the appearance of the four officers of Parliament. I don't think there is anything unreasonable in my proposal, and I would even go further by saying that it is very reasonable.

I hope the members will support my proposal. I think our meetings have gotten off to a good start. Of course, there have been some frictions, but so far, I am very proud to say that we have managed to achieve consensus on each of the motions we have adopted under your leadership, Mr. Chair. I hope everyone will be satisfied that I have the best of intentions—

• (1255)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: —and that I don't want to do anything that is not appropriate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

I was just going to say that with about one minute to one o'clock, we have a great opportunity to test that consensus around the table by voting on this motion.

I see no other speakers on this motion, so I will put it to a vote.

I have a request for a recorded vote, Madam Clerk, on Mr. Fergus's motion.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3)

The Chair: Thank you.

The motion is adopted.

With that, the meeting is now adjourned.

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