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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 119 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, November 22, 2023, the committee is resuming its study of Bill C-316, An Act to amend the Department of Canadian Heritage Act (Court Challenges Program).

[*English*]

I just want to remind you again about the new rules we have. I want to remind members and other meeting participants of the following preventative measures to protect the hearing of the interpreters.

To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that can cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpiece away from the microphone at all times. When you're not using it, there's a decal on the desk right in front of you with a picture of an earpiece. Please put your earpiece face down on top of that when you're not using your earpiece.

Keep your cellphones away from the microphones, etc., because that causes feedback.

In the communiqué from the Speaker to all members on Monday, April 29, the following measures have been taken to help prevent audio feedback.

All earpieces have been replaced by a new model that reduces the probability of audio feedback. The new earpieces are black, and the old earpieces were grey. Please only use a black, approved earpiece. By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of a meeting. When you are not using your earpiece, place it face down on the middle of the sticker on the right-hand side of your table.

There are some cards on the table to help you understand what the rules are with regard to feedback.

The room layout has been adjusted to increase the distance between committee members so that we're not causing each other audio feedback.

I want to thank you for your co-operation.

As you well know, today's meeting is being done in a hybrid format. I just want to remind you that you're not allowed to take photographs of what's going on in the room because it will already be on a website.

I'm informing the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Now I have a couple of general comments for the benefit of the members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. Members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. Those in the chat can please press the hand icon there.

There is a little globe at the bottom of your screen that you can press for interpretation in English or French—the language of your choice.

We have some witnesses who have been here before. We have five witnesses. We have Geoffrey Sigalet, assistant professor. He will not be providing an opening statement because he already provided one when he was here earlier on. Then we have, from the Canadian Constitution Foundation, Josh Dehaas, counsel. Then we have François Côté, attorney and doctor of law with Droits collectifs Québec. The other witnesses—Bennett Jensen, director of legal, Egale Canada; and Humera Jabir, staff lawyer, West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund—will not be providing opening statements.

For the people making the statements, you have five minutes. It doesn't matter if you do not finish everything you want to say. When you're being asked questions by the members, you will be able to elaborate on some of the things that you didn't get to say.

I want to begin with Josh Dehaas, counsel for the Canadian Constitution Foundation.

Please begin, Mr. Dehaas. You have five minutes.

• (1540)

Mr. Josh Dehaas (Counsel, Canadian Constitution Foundation): Good afternoon, Madam Chair.

My name is Josh Dehaas. I'm counsel with the Canadian Constitution Foundation.

The CCF is a non-partisan legal charity dedicated to defending Canadians' rights and freedoms through education, communications and litigation.

The CCF is funded by individual donors across Canada who support our view of a freer and fairer Canada. One might think the CCF would be first in line to defend a program that hands out billions of dollars per year to fund litigation on constitutional and quasi-constitutional issues. After all, it's easier to apply for thousands of dollars of taxpayer funding than to build up a litigation fund \$50 or \$100 at a time. However, the CCF doesn't support the Court Challenges Program, and it should not be entrenched into law.

We don't support the Court Challenges Program for three reasons.

First, this program takes the debate about the meaning and content of rights out of Parliament and legislatures, where the debate more often belongs.

Second, the Court Challenges Program risks warping the Constitution through the ideological biases of the minister in charge of the program and those who decide which particular cases get funded.

Third, there are better ways to strengthen constitutional rights and freedoms than by appointing a small group of elite law professors to divert tax dollars to their preferred legal challenges.

Allow me to elaborate on my first point that the Court Challenges Program removes the debate on the meaning and content of rights from the proper venue.

The program encourages citizens to push for their preferred social policies through the courts rather than by convincing their fellow Canadians. One example of this is the medical assistance in dying case, *Carter v. Canada*. In *Carter*, the applicant had an irremediable medical condition that made it physically impossible for her to end her own life and therefore stop her suffering. The courts were well placed to decide whether the state prohibition on MAID violated Ms. Carter's rights. However, intervenors used that case to push for recognition of a broader right to euthanasia, which led to a rushed implementation of a MAID law that didn't properly take into account many stakeholder concerns.

Parliament was much better placed to decide this difficult policy question than the courts. MPs are democratically accountable, which forces them to consider a wide range of viewpoints. Parliament also has structures in place in its law-making, such as debate and committee hearings like this one. Courts, by contrast, are limited by the evidence and the facts that are before them and ill-equipped to take on this type of social policy-making. Yet, that's what the Court Challenges Program tends to encourage.

This brings me to my second point, which is that this program risks warping the Constitution through ideological biases.

The Court Challenges Program is administered by a management committee that consists mostly of academics and administrators from the University of Ottawa. Despite the program making decisions about which lawsuits are of such national importance that they ought to be funded by all Canadian taxpayers, the program is overseen by a small group of academics and administrators work-

ing inside the Ottawa bubble. The seven expert panellists, who make the case-by-case funding decisions, are also drawn from an elite group of legal academics and human rights experts; they don't represent the breadth of Canadian viewpoints of the law or of which issues are of national importance. The current panel, for example, consists of several legal progressives, but no apparent legal conservatives. That means a tiny clique of left-leaning academics is giving out millions of taxpayer dollars each year to decide which proposed constitutional challenges are more likely to be heard.

The ministers who have overseen the program in recent years appear to have appointed mostly people who share their viewpoint on the Constitution and are more likely to fund cases that are more likely to push the constitutional jurisprudence in the direction they want it to go. The same risk exists with a future Conservative government, whose ministers might be tempted to appoint only legal conservatives, thereby warping the jurisprudence in a different direction.

The only way to avoid this sort of political bias is to abolish the program entirely.

This brings me to my third and final point. There are better ways to ensure the Constitution is respected. First, politicians could ensure that judges are appointed in a timely manner so that those—

• (1545)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Josh Dehaas: —facing potential violations of their rights can have their cases heard in a timely fashion.

Second, politicians could be braver about defending rights and freedoms by proposing rights-protecting legislation, by speaking out when other politicians propose rights-infringing laws or by intervening in cases.

Third, and most importantly, rather than taking millions of dollars each year out of the pockets of Canadians so that an elite group of legal experts can direct those funds to their preferred legal challenges, parliamentarians can ensure that rights are respected by letting Canadians keep more of their hard-earned money so that they can direct it to civil society groups like the CCF that are fighting for their rights and freedoms.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now go to *Droits collectifs Québec*, with Mr. François Côté, attorney and doctor of law.

You have five minutes, please, Monsieur Côté.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Desjardins): You're on mute, Mr. Côté.

[English]

The Chair: There is a technical issue.

We will suspend for a second while we check what's going on here.

• (1545) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1550)

The Chair: We'll resume the meeting.

Monsieur Côté, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. François Côté (Attorney and Doctor of Law, Droits collectifs Québec): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

Before we begin, I would like to recognize and salute the previous intervention by my colleague, Mr. Dehaas, which was very enlightening.

[Translation]

Madam Chair, members of Parliament, distinguished committee members, it's a privilege for Droits collectifs Québec to appear before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to share our thoughts on Bill C-316.

Droits collectifs Québec is an independent civil society organization whose mission is to contribute to the defence of collective rights in Quebec, particularly citizens' linguistic and constitutional rights.

Our non-partisan organization is active in public education, social mobilization, political representation and especially legal action.

In fact, we're frequently called upon to intervene before the courts in defence of fundamental rights, for or on behalf of Quebec litigants. As a major civil participant in the defence of rights and access to justice, Droits collectifs Québec brings its extensive knowledge of the field to its testimony before this committee. Specifically, we interact directly with the court challenges program and its funding application process. We're here because we have first-hand knowledge of and direct experience with the subject matter of this bill.

Justice is blind, but it is not free, unfortunately. What is a constitutional guarantee worth to people whose rights are violated and who would have to spend \$100,000 on legal counsel and fees to have those rights upheld by the court, money they simply do not have?

To ensure access to justice, as well as to recognize and offset the significant costs associated with constitutional litigation, the federal government created the court challenges program in 1978. It's a neutral and independent funding program designed to financially assist Canadian citizens in asserting certain constitutional rights, language rights and human rights before the courts.

The court challenges program has evolved over the years, but it has always been a financial support program controlled by the ex-

ecutive branch of government. It has therefore always had the flexibility to respond to changing economic winds, but it has always been vulnerable to political winds. The court challenges program has been cancelled, restored, cancelled and restored a number of times since the 1990s.

Now, Bill C-316 proposes to enshrine the program in Canadian law. Some might say that this is a way to avoid leaving it at the mercy of the next government in power. Droits collectifs Québec will not comment on the political implications of this move, but our organization supports the initiative in Bill C-316 to codify the program. However, two important aspects still need to be improved.

Droits collectifs Québec welcomes the move to codify a court challenges program that can lead to challenges to national laws and policies and to submit it to the House of Commons and to democratic debate. However, there's the matter of transparency, and the preamble of Bill C-316 talks about holding the government to account. Wouldn't it make sense for that to apply to the administration of the court challenges program funds themselves?

Let's not lose sight of the fact that a constitutional challenge means challenging the validity of federal or provincial laws. This program uses public funds to change laws and policies. Knowing what's being done with that money and which causes it is funding, while respecting party confidentiality, is a matter of public interest.

However, the court challenges program does not currently provide any details about how its funds are distributed. It funds dozens of constitutional challenges to the tune of \$3 million per year, but no information is publicly available to indicate which cases get that funding.

The parties' confidentiality obviously has to be respected, but it is in no way a breach of confidentiality to say that a given case in a given district, A v B, file number 12345, concerning a given constitutional right, received a given amount of funding. No confidential information would be disclosed, and a crucial transparency objective would be achieved.

As such, we believe that Bill C-316 must be amended to add an accountability element to the court challenges program—

• (1555)

[English]

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, Mr. Côté.

[Translation]

Mr. François Côté: —so that it provides at least a summary of the cases that are funded.

Then there's an issue related to the division of powers. The court challenges program should in no way be used to fund challenges to provincial legislation.

The court challenges program should be used exclusively for federal laws and policies. The federal government can legitimately subject its own laws to civil oversight and provide funding through its own grants, but there is something deeply disturbing—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

I'm going to ask you to wrap up that sentence.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Côté: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: You will have an opportunity to expand later on, thanks.

I want to thank the witnesses for their presentations.

We're now going to the question-and-answer segment. The six minutes include a question and the answer. I'd like everybody to be as succinct as they can, please, so we can get more questions in.

We begin with the Conservatives and Rachael Thomas.

Mrs. Thomas, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

My first question will go to Mr. Dehaas.

In your opening remarks, you said that the only way to avoid partisanship within the Court Challenges Program would be to abolish it altogether. I'm curious if you can expand a little bit more as to why there wouldn't be another way that it could perhaps be amended or revised to achieve that end.

Mr. Josh Dehaas: I don't believe that merely amending the program would fix the concerns about bias, because, at the end of the day, particular cases that get funded would always be chosen by a minister. If you did not have a court challenges program, instead you would have a situation where individuals choose which particular civil society organizations they wish to support with their own funding. That's why I believe that reform is not the way to go.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I have a follow-up question then to Mr. Sigalet. Would you agree or might there be changes or amendments that you would suggest?

Mr. Geoffrey Sigalet (Assistant Professor, As an Individual): I tend to agree. You have two different rights organizations here, one of which gets funding from the Court Challenges Program, the CCF, and one that is more radically progressive, Egale Canada, that probably receives funding from the Court Challenges Program. We're not sure about that because there's a lack of transparency. That already shows the kind of partisan charge here.

I would say that there is an extent to which Mr. Dehaas makes a great point, which is that if Pierre Poilievre wins the next election, then the Conservatives are in charge of this program and they reorganize it. We could put in institutional structures that require kind of bipartisan approval for lawsuits to go forward, and there are ways you could model that by requiring it to be multi-party, in that every party needs to approve a lawsuit before it goes forward.

There could be some kind of formal rule like that, or every party gets to nominate one member of the board or something like that.

However, this is never going to fully work, because your party is never going to agree to the NDP and the Greens both getting to choose somebody and then there being a non-Conservative-picked majority on that committee. There are all kinds of problems that you're going to experience this way, and inevitably, there's going to be the temptation to rig it your way, to fund the kinds of cases that Conservatives care about.

The problem is that there's just always going to be this back and forth. The problem also comes in the devil in the details, the difficulty of properly designing an institution that gets bipartisan buy-in. That's just very difficult to organize. I'm not saying that it's impossible; I'm just saying that it's going to be very difficult.

• (1600)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Sigalet.

In your opening remarks the other day, you commented on the origin of the Court Challenges Program. We know that it was originally created by Trudeau senior in order to challenge Quebec provincial laws. We know that this, of course, poses a risk to federalism in Canada. Can you comment further as to the impact of this program with respect to provinces and their jurisdiction?

Mr. Geoffrey Sigalet: There's a well-known article in Canadian political science by F.L. Morton called "The Effect of the Charter of Rights on Canadian Federalism". It notes that this program is part of a kind of centralizing effect, where federally appointed judges decide rights cases that challenge provincial laws. The litigation that they see is influenced by the funding for different groups challenging federal funding through this program, for different groups challenging federal laws. It's kind of a sneaky way for the federal government to disallow provincial laws on that analysis. There's a mini-debate in political science about the extent to which that happens or doesn't happen.

Unfortunately, it makes it harder for us political scientists to have that debate properly when we can't tell what the program is funding. One key thing, like I said in my testimony, is that, whatever you do, make this bill transparent. Ensure transparency so we know how much federal funding Mr. Jensen's organization is getting to sue Saskatchewan, let's say. It then becomes public and more accountable.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Precisely. Thank you. I appreciate your comments.

Mr. Dehaas, I have a question for you concerning an article that was written by you in the National Post in 2019 entitled, “Why are we paying people to sue the government?” In there, you said, “giving money to lawyers to sue the government is a backdoor way for Liberals to force the policy changes they want without the political risks.”

Can you expand on that further? Why is that a correct statement?

Mr. Josh Dehaas: Certainly.

With this program, as I mentioned before, at the end of the day it's the minister who appoints the seven experts for each part of the program, who decide which cases get funded.

If they appoint people that all have their own particular view of the Constitution, then it's more likely that they will get the cases before the courts that are more likely to lead to the particular policy outcomes that they prefer.

The way that should work in a democracy is that those particular politicians go to the people and say that this is what they think the law should be and then fight for those particular viewpoints.

We're talking about the program being used as a backdoor way to modify federalism. I think you can think of potential examples where there are provincial laws proposed and the federal government, for political reasons, doesn't want to upset people who support those particular provincial laws, but they disagree, so they just leave it to the Court Challenges Program to bring forward cases that are more likely to shift the jurisprudence in that particular direction.

• (1605)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you very much for your time, gentlemen.

The Chair: We now have Patricia Lattanzio.

You have six minutes.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. Can you just let me know when I have one minute left? I'd like to share the floor with my colleague.

My question will be addressed to Ms. Humera Jabir.

We have heard statements from some of the witnesses who have hinted at the desire to restrict the use of the CCP by Quebec's English-speaking minority community.

In your view, Ms. Jabir, what may be the impacts of such a restriction?

Ms. Humera Jabir (Staff Lawyer, West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund): Certainly, speaking on behalf of West Coast LEAF, which is an organization focused on gender equality and substantive equality—which means equal protection of the law and equal benefit of the law for all people—what's important for us is that this really is the case.

In terms of cases that come before the CCP for consideration, what's important is that those be considered on the basis of the legal questions that are at issue. There is the importance of those legal questions to the development of constitutional law and the impact

of outcomes, not only on one community necessarily, but on a broader range of communities.

I think it's very important that we take the focus out of individual cases and individual context because this program is also about the development of constitutional law, recognizing that we live in a society and in a legal system that is based on precedent. Cases decided by the Supreme Court of Canada that relate to one area have legal implications for people across the country.

I think that's really an important consideration for this committee. As you consider the cases that the CCP might be looking at, take it out of individual context or individual communities and recognize that constitutional law doesn't develop just in one context; it develops for everyone.

That's an important aspect of, for instance, the intervenor process that the CCP program funds, which allows groups that might be impacted by a case to also participate in those legal proceedings to ensure that the wider implications are before the court.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you for that.

I understand that it's clear that you would think the bill would benefit from strengthening the assurances made for access to all communities.

Is that correct?

Ms. Humera Jabir: Absolutely.

Certainly, I think it's very important that those who are marginalized and who face intersecting forms of discrimination in our society have access to justice. It's important that rule of law is premised on access to justice. Our charter rights and human rights depend on that access.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: In your view, is it appropriate for the program to be limited to test cases?

Ms. Humera Jabir: It really depends on how a test case is defined. The CCP seems to define that in a broader way at the current moment to consider issues that courts have not necessarily addressed before.

However, it is also important that the CCP deal with cases as they come forward. As an example, there could be a case that's brought to prevent the rollback of a benefit that is provided by the government, as well as cases that deal with novel issues that may not necessarily be novel legal issues, but address legal issues in a novel context.

A test case can be one way of framing that, but it should be interpreted broadly by the program.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: In your view, how important is the privilege relationship between the program and its grant recipients? Also, why must we strive to maintain a balance between transparency and this privilege relationship?

Ms. Humera Jabir: The key aspect here, and I stated this in my opening remarks, is that if we go back to the charter, it is a negative rights document. It prevents the infringement of people's rights by the government. Litigation related to the charter, as well as other human rights litigation, is necessarily adversarial, and the government is on the other side.

The worst-case scenario for anyone who is involved in constitutional litigation or involved in this program would be to see the politicization of funding such that a case that's brought forward that has serious issues...the funding is limited or pulled for a political reason. That's where the privilege relationship is important, and that's what the committee must focus on. That transparency must be balanced with independence and the protection of the applicants to the extent that their litigation may not be damaged or interfered with because it isn't in favour of the government, which it may not necessarily be. It may run counter, and likely runs counter, to government interests. I think that's the key concern.

On the question of litigation privilege, the government has litigation privilege, and it's important for this committee to consider why parties that, because of their need, seek funding in order to access justice should have to give up their litigation privilege, and the equity concerns around that. This is because they access what, I would say, could be a small amount of funding compared to the total cost of litigation that a party might have to encounter in order to bring their claim forward.

• (1610)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Patricia. I forgot the one-minute call. I was just going to give you a 30-second call, so if you want to—

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Okay. I'm sorry.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Our colleague asked for a one-minute call. It would be a courtesy on the part of the committee to give her the one minute she asked for in order to share the floor with her colleague.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Martin, something's wrong with my volume.

Can you begin again?

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, before she began speaking, Ms. Lattanzio asked that you inform her one minute before the end of her turn. I think it would be a courtesy to at least give her the minute she asked for so she could share the floor with her colleague.

[English]

The Chair: If the committee is unanimously in favour, I'm fine with that. Everyone seems to be nodding.

Go ahead, Patricia. You have a minute.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll cede the one minute that's left to my colleague.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to move the motion put forward by MP Noormohamed last week, which was sent to all members of the committee. The motion reads as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of no less than four meetings to study the concerning rise in far-right extremism in Canada, that study include how far right extremism plays a role in misinformation and disinformation; how to better support preventable measures for ideologically motivated extremism in Canada and the connection between far-right extremism and harassment towards journalists, women, Indigenous Peoples, Black, and racialized communities, members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community and religious minorities; that the committee report it's findings and recommendations to the House; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. Has everyone received a copy of that motion?

Clerk, do we have a copy of this motion that was not distributed or that you received?

The Clerk: It was distributed on May 2. I can print out a copy for the committee.

The Chair: We will suspend while everyone gets a copy of it, because I don't have a copy of it.

We're suspended.

• (1610)

(Pause)

• (1615)

The Chair: I'm going to explain to the witnesses that a motion has been moved, and it's going to have to be dealt with right now, so I'm going to ask you to stand by. Maybe we can deal with this motion very quickly. If we see that it's not going to be dealt with quickly, we may have to come to some other conclusion and decide on how to let the meeting move forward.

We will begin.

Niki Ashton, is your hand up?

Is Michael's hand up? All right. Okay then.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): I want to make an amendment.

The Chair: We'll put you on the list.

Ms. Romanado, would you like to speak to your motion?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you, Madam Chair. Other than to say that I support it, I will cede the floor to the next speaker.

The Chair: We will go to Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Can we get paper copies of the motion that has been moved and that we're discussing?

The Chair: I think we're trying to do that, but we just can't keep delaying. If you got an electronic copy, we're going to get you the paper copy soon.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Did the clerk send the electronic copy?

The Chair: Yes, that's what I asked everyone, and everyone nodded that they had received the electronic copies.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I don't believe I was a part of that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I realize that the Liberals have moved this motion, and that they would appreciate nothing more than to spend this time debating this motion. I think that's unfortunate, because we have a whole host of witnesses who are here with us today, and we have an important study with regard to the Court Challenges Program and Bill C-316 on the table. Essentially, what they are doing, then, is opting to hijack the rest of this meeting for the next hour and 40 minutes to discuss a motion that they've put out there, at the expense of the witnesses who are here testifying.

• (1620)

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: That is not a point of order.

The Chair: I don't think she had a point of order.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Then I'd like to know—

The Chair: She put her hand up to speak to the motion.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I'd like to know why she has the floor. Is it on the basis of her saying she didn't have the motion? Now we're going into the specifics of this motion.

The Chair: No, she has the floor, so I'm going to have to let her speak. I'm sorry. She has a valid reason to speak.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I just want to understand, on a point of clarification, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I have a list of people wishing to speak—

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Members came in basically saying, "I don't have the motion."

I understand that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): No, I can clarify for you.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Basically, she was told it was sent by email.

The Chair: I think she was reading—

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: She put her hand back up, but there were other speakers who had their hand up before she did.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's how this works.

I have a point of order.

She had the floor. She can talk about whatever she wants as long as it's relevant. She did that.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I don't think we need points of order here.

Philip, I think Mrs. Thomas has the floor. She did not stop speaking, and she had her electronic version.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas, please continue.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I'll just clarify for the honourable member across the way. I had my hand up, which means I was acknowledged as the first speaker on the list.

First, I needed to make sure that I was speaking to the correct motion. That's what a responsible member of Parliament does. After I was able to verify that, I was able to speak to it, so I'm continuing with the time that was granted to me by the chair.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Michael, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I put up my hand when the motion was being moved, so I assume that I was the first speaker, and the NDP member was second.

The Chair: I'm going by the list that the clerk has. She noted hands up, and you are the third speaker and Ms. Ashton is the fourth.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I was stating that we have a whole host of witnesses who are here. They've come to speak to Bill C-316.

The motion that is on the floor, brought forward by the Liberal members, is something that can be debated at any point in time. It's common that a motion can be brought forward when we have witnesses here, but most often a courtesy is granted, and the motion is moved toward the end of the committee meeting in order to respect the time of our witnesses.

I do wonder if Mrs. Romanado would agree to, perhaps, in a friendly way, withdraw the motion. She could then move it within a matter of time, when it comes back around for the Liberals' question period. It would give the opportunity for the motion to still be moved, but it would also give us the opportunity to respect the time of our witnesses.

In a friendly way, I'll propose that to Mrs. Romanado, but I would just remind the chair that I do still have the floor, and if she's not amenable to this friendly suggestion, I still wish to speak.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I think we could probably deal with this quite quickly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

She did have the floor. It had been sent to everyone on May 2, I think. There was enough notice of this motion coming forward. It being tabled right now means we have to discuss it. If Mrs. Romanado does not want to move it forward, you continue to have the floor, Mrs. Thomas, to speak for or against the motion.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I would move a motion that we adjourn this debate, and we continue to hear from our witnesses today.

The Chair: Does everyone feel we should have a recorded vote on this?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes, I would like a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: The debate continues.

Mrs. Thomas, I'm going to move to the next speaker unless you want to continue.

• (1625)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair, for checking in with me. I appreciate that. That's very kind.

I am good to cede the floor for now.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now go to Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much.

I am disappointed. It was really only through the courtesy of my colleague Mr. Champoux that the Liberals even had the ability, because otherwise they would have blown through the time. It's unfortunate that courtesy was taken advantage of.

To move a motion that is clearly partisan in nature when it's meant to obstruct our study is strange, because it's led by a Liberal member.

I thought we were having a constructive conversation. I thought there was some excellent witness testimony from all witnesses—from Liberal, NDP and Conservative witnesses. I would very much have liked to go forward.

I know Mr. Serré has been waiting patiently to get his legislation through. I have a lot of respect for the member. It's disappointing that they've decided to obstruct their own legislation.

We will be reviewing and providing more in-depth feedback with respect to this motion. I think it's fair to say that it requires some changes to take some of the partisan bite out of it and to move it to an area that is important.

Of course, all parliamentarians want to make sure that we protect all people and that everyone feels safe, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, race, culture or ethnicity. I believe that all 338 parliamentarians have it in their hearts to make sure that everyone gets an opportunity—whether they're born in Alderville First Nation, downtown Toronto or downtown Vancouver, and regardless of who they love—to be treated with the respect and dignity that all people deserve.

I know from earlier that Mr. Coteau has spent some of his life fighting racism, which I think is brilliant. I appreciate his service.

I think this is a very serious issue. I'm disappointed by the partisan tone of the motion. I think we could all work together to fight racism and to fight discrimination in all forms.

There is just one area that is missing. You could perhaps put it under religious minorities. I would specifically like to see anti-Semitism called out, which we don't have in this.

I'll actually bring back and just discuss a motion that the Conservatives brought forward, which unfortunately was stonewalled by the Liberals. I would just like to read into the record—

The Chair: Mr. Lawrence, we are now debating a specific motion on the floor. You cannot read another motion right now to discuss it.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I can read it for context. I'm not moving it. I'm not giving notice of it. It's just for context. It's no different from reading a piece of Hansard or something.

The Chair: All right then, continue.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Conservatives brought the following motion:

Given that,

according to a National Post article published on April 17, a York University faculty committee has presented a list of anti-Semitic recommendations that include labelling the support of Israel as “anti-Palestinian racism”; classifying anyone who supports Israel as “anti-Palestinian, Islamophobic, and anti-Arab”; granting academic freedom and free speech to pro-Palestinian students, while revoking these same rights from Jewish students and anyone supportive of Israel; and identifying Zionism as “a settler colonial project and ethno-religious ideology” that should be isolated and destroyed, and that

the Government of Canada has committed to the Canada anti-racism strategy, and that

the Minister of Canadian Heritage is responsible for “fostering and promoting Canadian identity and values, cultural development, and heritage,” and

the 2024 Canadian universities anti-Semitism report highlights—

• (1630)

The Chair: Mr. Lawrence, I don't know if this is a filibuster or not, but this has nothing to do with the motion on the table. I'm sorry.

The motion on the table is to study far-right extremism and the role it plays in misinformation and disinformation.

I would like to ask you to stick to the motion, please.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I am.

Part of it says, and this is the part that I'll relate back, “and harassment towards journalists, women, indigenous peoples, Black and racialized communities, members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community and religious minorities”.

I'm hoping that religious minorities, on harassment, would include anti-Semitism. I certainly hope that's the truth.

The Chair: I would hazard a guess.

I'd ask Ms. Romanado to explain, but I would suggest that religious minorities would mean all of the religions in Canada.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Right. That's why I want to talk about the importance of fighting anti-Semitism in Canada. That brings me back to the motion that was unfortunately stonewalled by the Liberal Party. It is:

the committee unequivocally condemn the anti-Semitic conduct of this faculty committee at York University and report this to the House.

As a practice, I never try to impugn the intentions of other members. I believe we are all honourable, all 338 of us, and I believe that we all want to fight the scourge of racism and anti-Semitism. Just to show that clearly this motion needs to be amended to include the fight against anti-Semitism, I'm going to ascribe that to an oversight although I will express my disappointment on behalf of the Jewish community. I certainly heard from them about the failure of this committee because of Liberal stonewalling to pass a motion clearly calling out anti-Semitism, and it would be an absolute travesty if we were to do that twice.

The Jewish community is under incredible pressure regardless of what's going on in Israel or Gaza. I have talked to many parliamentarians, and I've talked to many people in the Jewish community who don't feel safe. They feel like they are under pressure.

I have to tip my hat to Anthony Housefather, a Liberal MP, just to show you that I'm non-partisan, in his calling out of the City of Ottawa for their refusal to celebrate Israel because they couldn't guarantee safety. I think Anthony Housefather is 110% right when he said that it is the obligation of our country, and it is the obligation of all of our police forces, to protect our individuals at any—

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: A point of order.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Champoux.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, I feel like Mr. Lawrence is talking about a subject that falls more within the purview of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security than the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I'm not opposed to what he's saying, on the contrary, but I think we should get back to the subject of the motion at hand. If we want to get back to our witnesses and the topic of the day, perhaps we could stick to the content of the motion.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lawrence.

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have a great deal of respect for my colleague, and I understand his point of view.

[English]

I want to apologize. I'll extend my apologies to my friend.

This contemplates the harassment of religious minorities. I think it's important to specifically call out anti-Semitism. If there is not a mention of it—I thought I saw it, but maybe I did not—there should also be a specific call for the protection against Islamophobia as well.

• (1635)

The Chair: Are you going to propose an amendment, Mr. Lawrence?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm going to discuss it. I do have a wide latitude and those are the rules—

The Chair: I know you do, but if you're going to filibuster, I may have to let the witnesses know they can leave.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I am not filibustering.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: It's not your prerogative.

The Chair: Please, I'm speaking, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: As is he.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I do believe it would be wise at this point to allow the witnesses to leave, as I don't believe this is an easy or simple conversation.

The Chair: Continue, Mr. Lawrence.

You have the floor.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you.

As I was saying, given the charged nature which we currently live in, with the division that unfortunately is a real scourge on our great country, I think it's important that we parse our words very carefully. As I said, I believe that specifically we should be calling out Islamophobia as well as anti-Semitism.

I was just talking about the Liberal member, Anthony Housefather, as well as our Melissa Lantsman and Marty Morantz—

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Chair—

The Chair: Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: —I have a point of order.

I think it's pretty clear that we're witnessing a filibuster on a motion to study the rise of the far right. The far right is clearly anti-Semitic. It is clearly Islamophobic. This is exactly what we want to look into, so I don't understand why the Conservatives are wasting our time and why we don't get to the vote on this motion.

If they believe that they want to look into anti-Semitism, then let's see them vote for this motion, and let's cut this filibuster. We're wasting the witnesses' time. We're all wasting our time.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: This is not a point of order.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, this is not a point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm the chair. I will rule on whether it's a point of order or not.

Ms. Ashton has a point of order because she's referring us to get back to the order of what we're doing, which is to discuss a motion.

I must say, Mr. Lawrence, that you're drifting as far from that motion as possible. I think she's calling for us to get back—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: —using another superlative.

The Chair: —to the order of the motion. Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Ashton, for your point.

Now, Mr. Lawrence, you may continue.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: You can characterize this however you want, Chair, but you can read back the comments in Hansard. We are talking about racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia. It's all in here, and that's what I'm talking about.

Quite frankly, I think my comments are constructive, and I would actually welcome the conversation of whether we should include directly, in this proposed study, Islamophobia, because I believe that to be a scourge. Certainly, in talking to many of my Muslim friends, they have also commented to me that they don't necessarily feel safe.

Mr. Noormohamed, in this very committee, recounted his own experience growing up that he often felt like he was judged just because of his faith. I don't think anyone should live that, and I think that including it specifically within this study is absolutely critical.

Getting back to my original point, though, which is what I was going to get to, is I have heard Mr. Mendicino, Mr. Carr, Mr. Housefather, amongst many other Liberals talk about the scourge that is anti-Semitism. Of course, I've heard Conservatives call it out, including Mr. Morantz, Ms. Lantsman and our leader, Mr. Poilievre. However, I think, if we're going to have a four-meeting study on this, that we do understand some of the background.

I do want to add a little bit of context with respect to anti-Semitism in Canada. Canada actually has the fourth-largest Jewish community in the world, with over 390,000 Jews. Many of the folks I know of Jewish heritage or Jewish religion, however you wish to characterize it, have direct roots to the Holocaust. I myself am actually of part Jewish heritage as well, on my grandmother's side. When you hear the stories of the Holocaust survivors and how the storm that eventually came to be the Holocaust in Germany arose, they are horrific. Others might question why I want to include anti-Semitism in this study, but I think it's critically important.

Here's just a brief look into the world of folks of Jewish heritage. Here is what has happened in very recent history: vandalism, graffiti, circulation of hate propaganda, intolerant and racist language in places like Twitter, and comments on web forums and blogs. There have been bomb threats against Jewish schools and community centres, including not very far from where we are. We've heard of the intimidation of Jewish students even on our university campuses, which are there to be places of safety and of growth; and yet our Jewish students often, unfortunately, feel unsafe.

I'll continue here. There has been significant progress, and I would hate to see that reversed, as the last six months, since October 7, have been extremely challenging for our country. We've seen a rise of both Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. I think that needs to be, quite frankly, a focus of the study, if we want to study hate in our country. For example, police—

● (1640)

Mr. Michael Coteau: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Michael, go ahead. Let's hear your point of order.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I would just ask the member to add Islamophobia and anti-Semitism to the motion, and let's move forward. I think that's what he's getting at.

The Chair: Well, I had originally asked the member if he had an amendment. I'm hoping we will get an amendment from him, because he's made his point.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: There's no requirement to make our amendment.

The Chair: Are you going to propose an amendment, Philip?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have the floor for as long as I want. That's how that works.

The Chair: I know you do. I'm not asking you to cede the floor. I'm asking you if—

Mr. Michael Coteau: But it's very simple.

The Chair: You are suggesting that certain things be added. Is that going to be an amendment to—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: It likely will culminate in an amendment. I do want to put down the context. This is extremely important, and I will not back off from talking about the importance of anti-Semitism. I certainly hope no one here would get in the way of my talking about the important fight against anti-Semitism. That would be wrong. Quite frankly, members of your caucus have told me that they would be very disappointed.

The fight against anti-Semitism continues on here.

Police-reported hate crime data indicates that there were 608 hate crimes targeting religion as of May 2021. Of that number, 296 were incidents targeting the Jewish people.

I want to be clear: Whether you're targeting a Sikh, a Muslim or a Jew, an attack on one faith is an attack on all Canadians.

Of those incidents, 296 were targeting the Jewish population. That represented a decrease from incidents in 2018, so, as I said, progress was being made. Unfortunately in recent months it's been rough. It's been harsh for folks of the Jewish faith.

I would actually, at this point, like to propose my amendment. I will propose two amendments here.

● (1645)

The Chair: I'm afraid you can propose only one at a time.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm aware that you can bring only one amendment. I should have been more careful in my words. I apologize, Madam Chair.

You can obviously amend multiple phrases within one amendment, and that's what I'm trying to do.

The Chair: All right, go ahead.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: To start, we are going to move it down from four meetings to two meetings, just because we have a very full schedule.

I see Mr. Serré there. He's desperately trying to get to this important bill. In addition to that, we also have safety in sport. We, of course, as a committee, had training with respect to being better listeners and sensitivity, which was important. We also have very critical work to do, including this study. I believe we have five weeks left here, Madam Chair, with a total of 10 meetings, and I would like to see our business be done.

I would move that we reduce the number of meetings from four to two. At this point, I will cede the floor.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have an amendment on the floor, and it reads, “That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of no less than two meetings.”

Oh, you have your hand up, Mrs. Thomas. Is it to discuss the amendment?

Michael, go ahead, and then it will be Niki.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'm going to speak to the main motion.

The Chair: All right.

Niki, are you speaking to the main motion or the amendment?

Ms. Niki Ashton: It's for an amendment to the main motion.

The Chair: I have Mrs. Thomas on the amendment.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

The motion put forward asks for a four-meeting study looking at extremism in Canada—in particular, far-right extremism in Canada—and the impact that has on some communities that have been selected here by the Liberal Party of Canada, including “journalists, women, indigenous peoples, Black and racialized communities, members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community and religious minorities”.

As you can see from this list, there many folks who are omitted. Among them, of course, would be the Jewish community in Canada, which is actually the most harassed community in our nation at the moment and has been for quite some time. If we look at the crime rate and the hate crimes that are committed against folks, certainly Jewish individuals are the most targeted. Therefore, I'm confused as to why they're not on this list.

Nevertheless, the amendment we have moved here today calls for a two-meeting study. The reason for that is this: This committee is already undertaking quite a bit of work. The Liberal members have said again and again that their supposed priority is the safe sports study, yet they continue to move motions like the one we have in front of us, which take up time and take precedence over the safe sports study.

We spent quite a bit of time hearing from witnesses with regard to the impact that abuse in sport had on them. That report was drafted once and then some edits were made. Then it was redrafted. That second version is now in front of the committee and we're waiting to review it. That review is not scheduled for the next meeting, but the meeting after.

Therefore, accepting this motion in front of us would actually delay that report further. As the Liberals have highlighted in the past—and I'm not sure if it was genuine or disingenuous, given the conversation today—that report is a priority for them and is of utmost importance, yet again they continue to put hurdles in front of the completion of that report.

That baffles me. I think it baffles a lot of other folks who took the time out of their busy schedules to come and testify here and share their stories with us concerning the impact that abuse in sport had on them.

Now this committee continues to delay and to not complete that report and get it into the hands of the public. I think that's unfortunate. I think that's a misuse of those individuals' time, energy and emotional investment. I think it's actually an abuse of their trust in this committee and our ability to get things done.

The safe sports study is meant to take precedence, after completing the bill that is in front of us, so I am confused as to why we wouldn't make that happen.

Changing this study that has been proposed—to move it from four meetings to two meetings—would allow us to get on with the business of this committee, I guess, and to complete that report with regard to safe sport in Canada. This would be respectful of the witnesses who came and shared with us their testimony concerning their experiences within sport. It would be respectful of the members of this committee who have invested over two years in this study.

I will observe that there is only one permanent member of this committee at this table right now.

Therefore, to be respectful of those who have invested a great deal of time and energy and to be respectful of those witnesses who showed great vulnerability in sharing their stories with us, I do believe we should prioritize the completion of that report. That would require a shortening of the study that is being proposed here today by Mrs. Romanado by way of moving Mr. Noormohamed's motion.

Further to that, I would highlight to the committee that once the safe sport study has been completed and that report has been drafted, the next study on the docket has to do with online harms. That is a study having to do with women and girls, who have been subjected to immense harm online. For many, it's because images were taken of them without their consent and then plastered—

● (1650)

Ms. Niki Ashton: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Niki, go ahead.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I think we're all familiar with what's on the docket. We're all a part of this committee.

I think what we're seeing here is a continued attempt by the Conservatives to filibuster a motion to study the rise of the far right—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, this is not a point of order.

Ms. Niki Ashton: This requires more than two sessions.

The Chair: I'm sorry; I decide whether it's a point of order or not. I need to hear Ms. Ashton out. She is speaking to the order of the day, which is that we have an amendment on the table. She is speaking to that, so I think she has a point of order.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton, and finish what you were saying.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To conclude, we all know what's on the docket. We're talking about four sessions for a scourge that we're seeing across the country, the rise of the far right.

I just don't understand why the Conservatives have such a problem with spending four sessions to look into the rise of the far right. When will they stop filibustering? Let's get to a vote.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton, for your point of order.

Now, Mrs. Thomas, do you wish to continue?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As I was saying before being interrupted on a non-point of order, the next study that is coming up after the safe sport study, should we complete that, is an online harm study.

That study is a two-meeting study; it's very short. It's been on the docket for almost three years. However, due to the Liberals' gamesmanship, it has been punted numerous times out of a refusal to study, which I think is really sad. At the end of the day, that study is about women and children who have been violated because images of them have been shared online without their consent.

It also looks at children who have been subjected to the creation of pornography and then having those videos or those images shared online, again, of course, without their consent. It's true that it wouldn't matter if they consented or not; it's child pornography. That's disgusting and that's illegal.

These things, the illegal creation of child pornography and the spreading of images of individuals without their consent, are causing irreparable harm to women and girls in this country. There are dozens of stories that have been shared in Parliament to this effect. There are many who have committed suicide because they could not handle the degradation that was coming their way because of the bullying or mistreatment.

A study was brought forward, again, almost three years ago to look at this issue because it matters. That's a Conservative motion that was brought forward, and it was determined, through all-party support, that it mattered enough to study.

Again, here we are with the Liberals having put forward yet another motion that punts that study further down the road.

● (1655)

Mr. Michael Coteau: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Coteau, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Considering that we have half an hour left, do you think that, at this point, we should ask the witnesses to leave? It's obvious what the Conservatives are doing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

I will ask the committee if they agree that we should ask the witnesses to leave.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I thank the witnesses very much for taking the time to come to this meeting. I am so very sorry for what is happening.

I thank you for your presentations. I am sorry that we couldn't get any more of your wisdom in the answers about this bill. You may leave.

All right, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair.

As I was saying, to further punt this study with regard to online harms that are caused to women and girls because of these images being shared or created, I believe, is altogether irresponsible of this committee as a whole. It points to, I don't know, something that is uncaring, or unkind, about the Liberals' approach to not want to give that attention, and to continue to delay that for nearly three years.

I guess we have a middle ground that we're offering to come to. Instead of four meetings that the study proposed to us today, we would have two meetings. It would still allow the study to take place, but it would also allow us to move to complete the safe sport study, and, therefore, honour the witnesses who came and were part of that, the many athletes, parents and coaches who were represented by those individuals who came to this table, and had a voice on their behalf.

The second thing it would allow us to do, if we were to move down from four to two meetings, is to, hopefully, still complete the online harms study before the end of June, when the House of Commons breaks for the summer. At least that would be the hope. One cannot anticipate what games might be played, but that would certainly be the hope.

The point is that we're asking to meet in the middle. We're proposing that the study be for two meetings.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Thomas.

I now have Mr. Waugh.

Do you wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Yes, I wish to speak to the amendment.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It's kind of interesting, you know, there are so many forms of extremism in this country, and all are worthy to be examined. I look at the motion here, and it only mentions one kind of extremism. I was really disappointed, because it has turned this into something very political.

You know, the Liberals, Madam Chair—

● (1700)

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Lattanzio.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I'm sorry to interrupt my colleague, but we're on the amendment, right?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: The proposed amendment is from four to two meetings, correct?

The Chair: Yes, we're going to debate it.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: That's what we're speaking to. We're debating the duration of the study.

The Chair: I did ask Mr. Waugh if he was going to speak to the amendment, and not to the full motion.

Kevin, we have to speak to the amendment, which is a proposal of two meetings.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I would like to add to that point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: It is clear. I wouldn't say law, but it is a clear tradition that members are given a wide latitude, and so talking about the substance of the study within the amendment is more than within the rules. Certainly, in my five years of Parliament, I have heard much further wanderings from the substance than what Mr. Waugh was doing.

The Chair: Mr. Waugh, go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Madam Chair.

All I was going to say is that the Liberals proposed this discussion and then voted against postponing the discussion to allow us to hear witnesses. I think it's a bit rich to blame the direction of this meeting on us.

Our timeline is very tight. We need to hear from the minister by May 30. We haven't heard from the minister in a while, and she has been invited for the main estimates.

As you note, Madam Chair, there is only a maximum of eight or maybe 10 meetings left before we rise for the summer. I know we're going down to two meetings in the amendment, but I am concerned about the amendment, and I'll tell you why.

In 2009, my wife and I got my daughter to the March of the Living for educators. It was 2009. We sent our daughter over to Poland. To move ahead now, 14 or 15 years later, I am so thankful that we scraped together that money for her to go over to learn about the Holocaust and teach it in our classrooms.

Now, when I see this motion in front of me, I'm a little disappointed that it doesn't include anti-Semitism because we're dealing with it in every city.

The two meetings would bring us towards the end of May, because we have the minister coming, and as duly noted by MP Thomas, we do need to hear about safe sport.

You have had a lot of emails, Madam Chair, and I have had dozens of emails on safe sport. Outside of Hockey Canada's inquest, I would say it was the second-biggest item that we have dealt with in a number of years in the Canadian heritage committee.

I wanted to throw that out there. We just got the report—thank you to the analysts for working day and night to get the full report to us—and now we have some recommendations on safe sport. The whole country is waiting for that report, and I can see now it's going to be delayed until probably the first part of June, which is too bad.

That's all I'll say on this. I was a little disappointed by the motion in that it did not include anti-Semitism, since I believe that is first and foremost what we've seen in this country from coast to coast.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Kevin.

Your hand is still up, Michael. Are you speaking to the amendment, or are you speaking to the motion?

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'll reserve my time for the main motion.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any further discussion on the amendment?

Philip, you moved the amendment, so you'll be closing it. I'm sorry.

Martin, would you like to speak on the amendment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, before the amendment was tabled, I put my name on the list to speak to the main motion. I just want to make sure that we go back to that list afterwards.

[*English*]

The Chair: I hope so. That's why, if Mr. Lawrence speaks, he would be wrapping up the debate on his amendment, and then we can call a vote on it.

Mr. Lawrence, please go ahead.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that.

This is an incredibly important topic. I want to make sure everyone's clear that I'm saying that.

I wish this had been raised, perhaps, in a subcommittee so we could have properly planned out the calendar. I'm relatively new to this committee, but in the other committees I've been on, usually there's more of a structured approach to the schedule, even if there is some disagreement as to how that schedule will occur.

I believe the motion currently calls for four meetings. We want two meetings, but it doesn't give us any type of timing as to how or when we're going to do that.

As I look at the calendar here, when we come back, we have Bill C-316. I believe it's scheduled for clause-by-clause, although we haven't gotten nearly through the witness testimony, so I don't know whether that's going to be changed. We have safe sport scheduled for May 23 and May 27. On May 30, we have the main estimates, and then we have online harms on June 3 and June 5, and that's without getting any of our other important business done.

Just on a point of clarification, I would ask in a friendly way if we have unanimous consent to having the other side...what their thought was as to when we would schedule the study for. I know it's a little bit of a break in protocol, and I would like the floor back, but if you're willing to express...that's great. If not, that's fine. You don't have to. It's not your obligation, but I was just curious.

• (1705)

The Chair: Mrs. Romanado, let's get as much clarification on the date as we can.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: There is no date in there, so it's up to the will of the committee when they'd like to schedule it. Nothing's getting punted if that's not the will of the committee.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's fine.

I believe you're the deputy House leader, Mrs. Romanado. Do I have that right?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I am the former one.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I know that you're very well aware of how to schedule the House and committees.

It's just that sometimes this committee is not operated, with all respect to all members here, at maximum efficiency. We're going to put the study forward without putting any dates up. I would hate to see our not getting our business done, such as getting through Bill C-316, of which I believe there was already an extension requested and granted by the House.

The online harms, as Mrs. Thomas said, is a very important study, as well as safe sport. Even not being on this committee, I have heard a lot about the importance of that study from my stakeholders.

It's for those reasons that I would close the debate—unless there's someone else—on the amendment to go from four to two meetings.

The Chair: The debate is now closed, so we will be calling for a vote.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Is there any discussion on this motion?

I'm sorry, Michael, you're next on the list. We'll then have Ms. Ashton, Mrs. Thomas, Mr. Waugh and then Martin. The clerk ensures that I don't do anything wrong with the list, I can assure you.

Before we get to Mr. Coteau, I would like to clarify something, Mr. Lawrence. You say you've only been on this thing for a short time, and we don't follow the instructions. We started in this session with a clear idea of what the subcommittee wanted, and the committee agreed to it.

Every time we were trying to stick to the schedule.... A committee has the ability to decide what it wants to do. We have had many motions put forward by political parties to move us off the agenda. I have pled with this committee on the safe sport. I don't think it's a case of what I do as a chair or what the clerk does; it's a committee deciding what it wants to do or not do.

I think we should go to the main motion—

• (1710)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: On a brief point of order, Madam Chair, I just wanted to say I was certainly not, in any way, attempting to blame the chair. I think that both you and Kevin have done a great job.

It's just, as you rightly pointed out, we have sometimes had challenges as to getting on to it. In no way did I mean to impugn your or Kevin's....

The Chair: I'm not taking personal umbrage here—I don't usually take personal umbrage. I'm just pointing out for clarification that we had a decision about where we were going to go, and each time we were moved off that decision by various things coming up. I wanted to point that out because it's come up, not just from the Liberals on this motion, but from many political parties before that.

Now, Michael, you have the floor on the motion.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to start by saying I'm very disappointed with the Conservatives for spending over an hour discussing the length of the study and categorizing this motion as partisan. There's a mainstreaming of extremism in Canada that's taking place, and I think it's our duty as politicians to call extremism out.

The far right has been growing over the last decade in this country. During COVID, we saw a rapid rise of not only extremism, but misinformation and disinformation. We know all forms of extremism impact all communities, including the Black community, indigenous people and religious minorities like the Jewish community and the Muslim community.

It's our job as politicians to call these things out. The only way extreme hate and extremism on the far right grows is when we're silent on these issues.

This was a very simple motion. I want to go through the motion just quickly because a member of the Conservatives actually said that this motion was partisan. To me, that is unacceptable because the motion is very clear. I want to thank the member who moved this motion for bringing this to the forefront.

I want to go through the content of this motion so Canadians who are listening have a very clear understanding of what's being discussed and what the Conservatives are calling partisan.

The first part of it asks for four meetings. It's a study of the rise of far-right extremism in Canada. It wants to examine how misinformation and disinformation are used. It wants to put in better support services and preventable measures to combat this extremism. And it wants to look at how extremism, far-right extremism, impacts journalists, women, indigenous people, our first people of this country, Black people, racialized communities, members of the 2SLGBTQ community and religious minorities. Madam Chair, that includes the Jewish community and the Muslim community and all religious minorities in this country. In fact, if the members wanted to be more specific, I would be very open to that as well. That's what we're debating here.

I cannot understand why, for the last hour, the Conservatives would delay, would go in all different directions and actually go to a point where we can't even listen to our witnesses on this important study we're doing. It's completely unacceptable.

This is not a partisan issue. This is about building a better country by exposing what's wrong. I would say without question that the number one role of Canadians, of politicians, when it comes to extremism, is to call it out. Extremism flourishes when people are silent. It works in the darkness, in corners of different parts of this country and in places on the Internet that we couldn't even imagine.

This is how it works. It's a very sophisticated network. I would really stress to all members of this committee, including the Conservatives, not to take this stuff lightly.

I understand there's a sticky point here, because the leader of the Conservatives, who recently visited a camp where there were extremists and was called out for it, decided not to denounce them. This has been on more than one occasion. He's had pictures taken with the far right.

• (1715)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Okay, Kevin, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Coteau: This is exactly what the Conservatives will do. This is a great example right now. Just for people watching—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Michael. I have a point of order on the table. I need to listen to it.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I should remind the member—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: This is [*Inaudible—Editor*] example of far right extremism to have a member—

The Chair: I am sorry, Mrs. Thomas. You do not have the floor. Mr. Waugh has the floor.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I would—

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, you do not have the floor. Mr. Waugh called out. He put his hand up, and he has the floor.

Please, have a little bit of respect for your colleague.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Have a little respect for your colleague, exactly, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Waugh, go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Chair, here we have a member talking about my leader.

Should I talk about your leader with regard to blackface? You know, it can be tit for tat here, Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: It's not a point of order, Madam Chair. If he wants to—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Chair, we have the Prime Minister who went around in blackface in this country.

Mr. Michael Coteau: That's not a point of order. They're interrupting me again.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm interrupting, Madam Chair, because—

Mr. Michael Coteau: It's not a point of order.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: You never let us interrupt on a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: —I am just pointing out that if he is going to take a shot at—

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, please—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes, please—

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Michael Coteau: If he wants to speak, put his name on the list.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Chair, I was just pointing out that he is taking shot at my leader. I can take a shot at his leader about blackface.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Put your name on the list, Mr. Waugh.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Waugh. That was not a point of order.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Coteau is bringing up his arguments for the motion, and he is allowed to do that. I heard arguments today for a whole lot of things that I think strayed away from the motion itself.

Thank you for speaking up, but I don't consider that to be a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, go ahead on your point of order.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Mr. Coteau just accused my colleague, Mr. Waugh, of being an example of far right extremism when Mr. Waugh called a point of order.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I never said that. I said that it was a perfect example—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I would invite you to make a ruling on that because that is—

Mr. Michael Coteau: Hold on.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, why are you allowing the member to speak over me right now when I have the floor, granted by you?

Mr. Michael Coteau: You just made a pretty serious accusation, and Mr. Waugh knows the difference of what I just said.

The Chair: I was just about to press the button to speak to exactly that, Mrs. Thomas. You presume to know what goes on in my head and in everybody's head.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I am simply asking you to bring this committee to order.

I held the floor—

The Chair: I am about to do that if you would allow me.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: —because you gave me the floor, Madam Chair—

The Chair: Yes, and—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: —and then you allowed Mr. Coteau to step in and start speaking over me.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, I am not going to fight with you because you seem to relish doing that.

I am just saying that I was about to press the button to tell Mr. Coteau that you had the floor when you challenged me about not doing it.

Please, let's get on with whatever you have to say.

Mrs. Thomas, go ahead.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, when you gave the floor to my colleague, Mr. Waugh, on his point of order, Mr. Coteau interrupted and said it was an example of far right extremism. That is unparliamentary.

A point of order was raised by Mr. Waugh, and for Mr. Coteau to call that an example of far right extremism is absolutely inappropriate.

I would ask you, as the chair, to make a ruling on that. Are you allowing that type of accusation to stand at this committee, or are we going to ask Mr. Coteau to withdraw his comment?

• (1720)

Mr. Michael Coteau: Can I speak to it, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Coteau. Speak to the accusation made towards you.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you.

I find Mr. Waugh a gentleman; I find him a very good parliamentarian. The point I was making is that this is a perfect example of the delay tactics that are being used. If there was any offence to Mr. Waugh, I do apologize because I actually find him to be a very kind and very dignified politician.

I don't know what the interpretation was with the member, but that accusation is quite silly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

Now, will you finish your discussion on the motion?

Mr. Michael Coteau: Yes.

My point is this: We have a leader of the official opposition. This is a person who holds a lot of influence and power in the House of Commons, but also a lot of influence across this country.

To go into a camp of far right extremists, to march with them, to shake hands with them, to have pictures, and to be called out on these exchanges and not retract his actions, not speak to those issues, is exactly what the problem is when it comes to how we combat extremism in this country.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have a point of order.

That is just patently false. The Leader of the Opposition has condemned this group, and this group has threatened his wife, so this is really out of bounds.

The Chair: That is not a point of order, Mr. Lawrence.

I'm sorry. Go ahead, Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: If you can you imagine, this group has.... I'll just use Mr. Lawrence's terms. I believe he said that the group has "threatened his wife". Could you imagine this type of threat made to a politician's spouse? Yet, for some reason, Mr. Poilievre goes into this camp, where clearly it was identified that there were folks who were connected to this extreme group, yet the Leader of the Opposition has not apologized for or spoken to this issue. I haven't heard him say anything to retract or to apologize for his actions.

I use this example because when we have people in these high-profile positions—it could be in business, it could be in politics, it could be in education—who are not speaking out against far right extremism, this is what allows our country to fail.

Again, I'm quite happy that this study has been brought forward so that we can look at how far right extremism is impacting the trans community and the racialized community and how it's impacting women in this country. There has been a connection to gender-based violence on this specific issue.

I think I'll end there and again thank the mover for this motion.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

Ms. Ashton, thank you for your patience. You have the floor.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

In fact, in line a bit with what we heard from Mr. Coteau, I know that we in the NDP feel very strongly about the Leader of the Opposition's visit with the convoy camp.

I would like to put forward the following amendment to the motion to be placed after the words, "the committee", in line one: "condemn the leader of the official opposition for visiting a convoy camp that celebrated far right extremists and a group whose founder was referred to as a violent extremist by Canada's Integrated Terrorism Assessment Centre and". It carries on to the rest of the motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to entertain debate on the amendment by Ms. Ashton.

Martin, please go ahead on the amendment.

Mr. Gourde.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: Please go ahead with your point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I would like to receive the French version of Ms. Ashton's amendment before we start debating it.

Would it be possible to get it in writing from the committee?

It's a basic constitutional right to receive a document in both official languages.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will suspend while we get it in French. Thank you.

• (1725)

(Pause)

• (1725)

The Chair: Can you please check that you all have the amendment in English and French before we begin to discuss it?

Thank you.

Yes, everybody has it. All right.

Niki, your hand is up. Do you want to speak to your amendment?

• (1730)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Absolutely, and I will make it brief, because I would like for this to move to a vote—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry. I have a point of order.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Of course, a point of order....

The Chair: Yes, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Classic....

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I don't actually have it. I have an amendment proposed by Niki Ashton, but I do not have it within the context of the motion and therefore I would not be speaking to something in a contextualized manner. It needs to be inserted within the motion.

The Chair: It is my understanding that Ms. Ashton said it was after the words in the first line, "Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee" and then her amendment. Then you move on to "undertake a study". The amendment is just put in there and inserted after "committee" and before "undertake".

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you. I can appreciate that.

It is customary at this committee that we see the amendment inserted into the motion before we continue deliberation.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Chair, we've all sat on numerous committees. This is the first time I've heard that it's customary. We've been pretty clear where it goes in the motion.

I feel that this is just another delay tactic from the Conservatives to not vote on a study on the rise of the far right.

The Chair: That's a valid point, Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have a point of order on this point of order.

I know that, in finance committee, we do see it in writing before we vote on it. This is not unreasonable.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lawrence, for that information.

Shall we now speak to Ms. Ashton's amendment?

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor to speak to your amendment.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I have a point of order.

Madam Chair, I think what you're hearing from the members is that there's a concern as to what we're discussing. The context of this amendment is unclear.

Despite what Ms. Ashton claims, it has always been customary at this committee that we see the amendment inserted into the overall motion so that we have a clear understanding of exactly what we're debating.

The Chair: That's generic as always, Mrs. Thomas. I don't think that's quite true, but there you go.

Have you received the insertion? I think the clerk has sent it to you now.

Yes, she sent it to you it inserted in the exact spot that Ms. Ashton mentioned it would be.

Ms. Ashton, please continue.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to say that I'm truly dumbfounded by the delay tactics that we've seen from the Conservatives today on an issue as serious as studying the rise of the far right.

I also want to put on the record that we've all sat—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's late, and I'm sure we all have obligations in the coming minutes and hours, so I would like to remind you that our committee time is up.

I would ask that the meeting be adjourned because it's past 5:30 p.m.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are you saying that we've gone past the time for this committee?

If you recall, the committee started quite late and had some delays because of microphone issues. I'm informed by the clerk—I checked before we got here—that we have until 5:55.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Chair, I'm not done—

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Ashton, please.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Chair, it's great that the clerk told you we can continue our meeting until 5:55 p.m., but our schedule says we—

[*English*]

The Chair: Can you start again, Mr. Gourde, please?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I just wanted to say that our schedules say we were supposed to finish at 5:30 p.m.

I have other obligations.

Other committee members may also have obligations after 5:30 p.m.

I would therefore like you to request unanimous consent to adjourn today's meeting.

If I have to leave, I'll have to find a replacement.

Our schedule said we'd be done at 5:30 p.m. I'm sure you understand.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will ask the question of the committee.

Do I have unanimous consent or majority consent to adjourn this meeting?

Some hon. members: No.

I'm hearing no from a lot of people.

Ms. Niki Ashton: No, I'm fine to stay.

• (1735)

Mr. Michael Coteau: No.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Gourde.

We do have this room, as the clerk informed me, until five minutes to six. We had many delays, if you recall, in the last meeting.

We faced this question on the opposite side. Everybody wanted to continue past time when we were supposed to end at five minutes after six, and everybody was arguing on the Conservative side that we should. Let's try to be fair to each other.

Mr. Gourde, I'm sorry; we're discussing this motion.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to speak briefly to the amendment I've shared. I think it's really important that when we talk about the current rise of the far right, it's not just something we see in our communities or saw in the events in Ottawa over two years ago. It's not just something we're hearing about in the news or from constituents or that we're facing ourselves as politicians.

It is something we saw on display just a few short days ago as the leader of the official opposition visited a camp where there were members who clearly identified support for Diagon, a far right extremist group, whose founder was referred to as “a violent extremist” by Canada's Integrated Terrorism Assessment Centre. This is profoundly disturbing.

We know that the leader of the official opposition has not condemned this group despite the vague assertions we've heard from the other side. There has not been a clear condemnation since the leader of the official opposition visited this camp. This is deeply disturbing.

We are seeing politicians egg on and practise dog whistles to the far right. It's incumbent on those of us around committees like this and in parliaments like ours to take a stand and condemn these groups, to condemn visiting with supporters of these groups and to condemn the rise of the far right in our country. This is a disturbing trend we are seeing in other like-minded countries around the world. It is incumbent on us to show the courage to stand up against hate, to stand with communities that are targets of this hate and to condemn politicians who are trying to score points by spending time with groups that celebrate these groups and that kind of hate.

Therefore, I think this is an opportunity, given these disturbing recent events, such as the meeting of the leader of the official opposition, to not just condemn this visit but more importantly support a motion to look into what the situation is right now in our country with the rise of the far right, how it is that communities are being targeted, what they are being subjected to and what we as parliamentarians can do about it.

We have a role in putting a stop to the rise of the far right and the rise of fascism within our country. Our role starts with showing leadership around this table, supporting motions like the motion in front of us today and stopping the playing of games to delay the vote on this important motion.

Finally, I call for a vote on the amendment, and I hope we will have a vote on this motion very soon.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Martin, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, I haven't spoken much since the start of this meeting. For one thing, I didn't have time, because after I had the courtesy of giving Ms. Lattanzio the time she requested, a motion was moved. It's not in keeping with our usual practices to move such a motion and disrupt the rest of the committee's work when witnesses are present.

Madam Chair, this committee has become a joke. It's embarrassing. I hope you have your earpiece and that you're listening to what I'm saying in French, because I'm talking to you and all the committee members.

We have important topics to discuss. We're not able to keep to our schedule. We have things that have been sitting on the agenda for months. We were supposed to submit the report on sport months ago. We all want to put forward topics for the committee's consideration. We're trying to finish studying a bill. We've changed the committee's schedule about 22 times, and we never manage to stick to our schedule.

In addition, there are people online who follow the committee's work on things like Bill C-316, on safe sport or on online content that's inappropriate for young people. These are important studies. We just wasted a meeting on a motion that could have been brought forward at any time. Madam Chair, this is embarrassing.

When we talk to industry people in sectors in the Canadian Heritage portfolio, they tell us that we have no credibility. People laugh at us because we can't see any of these topics through.

Madam Chair, I'm sick and tired of this committee being unable to get things done. The motion before us isn't a bad one, but why move it at the beginning of a meeting when we have important witnesses here?

I'm not done, Madam Chair.

• (1740)

[English]

The Chair: Martin, you're speaking to the motion. I want you to speak to the amendment.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'll wrap up.

We could have discussed this another time, but everyone here took the opportunity to make political statements. Now, the NDP wants to make another political statement to condemn a party leader—rightly or wrongly, I don't even want to debate it. We were supposed to move Bill C-316 forward today. We've lost two hours. We have other things to do.

Madam Chair, I move that the meeting be adjourned.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Martin.

Mrs. Thomas.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, I asked for the meeting to be adjourned; it's a mandatory vote.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Would you call a vote, Clerk.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Do we have anybody else who wishes to speak to the amendment?

I have Mrs. Thomas. That's the only other person on the list.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: It looks like Mr. Gourde is also on the speaking list.

There's been a lot of talk that has come from the Liberal members, in particular Mr. Coteau, and the NDP members, Ms. Ashton, talking about this motion as if it's this motion they're wanting to bring forward out of goodwill for the people, and yet, when they've spoken to it, the only thing they've done is taken the opportunity to attack the leader of the Conservative Party. In doing that—

Mr. Michael Coteau: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Coteau, please go ahead.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I think the member is misrepresenting me. I spoke for probably a good 10 minutes and my point about the leader—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, this is not a point of order.

The Chair: Order. I will decide what is or isn't a point of order, Mr. Lawrence—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: This is exactly what the Bloc member was saying. This is a joke.

The Chair: —but I have to listen to it before I can tell you if it's a point of order or not. Will you allow me to listen to what the member is going to say.

Mr. Coteau, please continue.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I don't know who was speaking, but that was a very loud outburst. I could almost hear it here in Don Valley East without my headset on.

I was saying that what the member just said misrepresents me. I spoke about the issue about extreme right-wing hate in this country. I mentioned the member for probably one minute out of several.

I'd ask the member to withdraw what she just said, because it's a misrepresentation of what I did.

• (1745)

The Chair: Mr. Coteau, that's not a point of order. It's a point of privilege, but go ahead. You've asked the member to withdraw what she said. I'm asking the member to withdraw so we can get on with the meeting.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I challenge the chair. There was nothing in there that was inappropriate.

The Chair: I beg your pardon, Mr. Lawrence?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I challenge the chair.

You ordered the member to withdraw.

The Chair: On my saying—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Your decision is incorrect. I challenge the chair.

The Chair: Mr. Coteau spoke to a point of privilege that he was misrepresented.

Go ahead and challenge the chair. Let's call a vote.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Madam Chair—

The Chair: Call a vote to challenge the chair, please.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): She didn't order her. She asked her if she would like to apologize. That's all she said.

She said that she was asking the member if she wants to.

The Chair: Mr. Lawrence, I did not make a ruling on anything. I asked the member if she would withdraw her statement because Mr. Coteau asked her to because he felt he was misrepresented. That's basically what's happening here. I have not made a ruling because I can't rule on that.

Mrs. Thomas, Mr. Coteau has asked that you withdraw the statement.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, by asking me to withdraw, you are then making a ruling. You're making a ruling in favour of Mr. Coteau.

The Chair: I'm not making a ruling, Mrs. Thomas. People speak through the chair. I know you don't think they should, but Mr. Coteau made a statement.

As a chair, I'm interpreting the statement that he made. I'm not ruling; I'm just asking. If you wish to not withdraw, that's fine. I'm not compelling you to do anything.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: The chair is asking me to withdraw.

The Chair: I'm saying that Mr. Coteau asked you to withdraw your statement.

Will you?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: No.

The Chair: All right, fine.

Mr. Coteau, Mrs. Thomas does not wish to withdraw her statement.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Wow, you required my input for that.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Coteau has said that's fine.

Mrs. Thomas, what were you saying?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: You are.... Oh my gosh, this is such a joke.

Mr. Michael Coteau: What?

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Did she call the chair a joke?

The Chair: Yes, she did. She did, but it's okay. My skin is very thick.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I would call a point of order on you.

Mr. Michael Coteau: What?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: What you just accused me of is incorrect. I did start out saying "you". I was going to make one statement. I withdrew it and said, "this is...a joke".

You just accused me, wrongly, of calling you a joke.

The Chair: You did—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, that is an inappropriate accusation that you just brought against me.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, I do not wish to debate you on issues like this because I think they are totally irrelevant and frivolous.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I absolutely agree.

The Chair: Will you continue? You have the floor. Please go ahead.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, the point is this: There's a motion on the floor asking to study far right extremism in Canada.

The Liberals and the NDP are choosing to move this motion because they simply desire to instigate a political fight. Both the Liberal and the NDP members have come forward and used this as an opportunity to attack the leader of the official opposition. Those statements have been made loud and clear.

This amendment that has been brought forward by Ms. Ashton from the NDP makes it abundantly clear that this motion is not really about gaining a better understanding as to what is going on in Canada with regard to extremism and its impact on people—the people who have elected us to represent them.

That is not what this motion is about. Instead, Ms. Ashton, through her amendment, is making it abundantly clear that the desire is simply to attack the leader of the official opposition. That would be the intent of this motion. It's to go after him because he stopped on the side of the road and had a conversation with someone. It was then learned that the individual comes from a group that has said some pretty disgusting things.

Of course we don't stand with those things.

For Ms. Ashton to turn this motion into that type of game is exactly what my Bloc colleague has said. It turns this committee into a joke, where we can score cheap political points by just throwing these accusations against one another. In this case, it's against Conservatives.

For what? Is it for a quick tweet that she just put out a few minutes ago? Congratulations. That's something to be proud of.

● (1750)

Ms. Niki Ashton: I have a point of order.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: This is an individual who ran for leadership of the NDP, for crying out loud—

The Chair: I have a point of order, Mrs. Thomas.

Yes, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mrs. Thomas, for sharing my life story. I look forward to hearing more.

I just want to say that I appreciate you questioning, frankly, everybody's motives. I do think it's very serious that your leader met with people who support Diagon. I think that has an impact on Canadians who are targeted by the far right and that's exactly what this study is about.

I would prefer it if my motives stood for themselves, based on the words that I shared earlier, rather than your analysis and, frankly, your dismissal of how dangerous it is to associate with supporters of Diagon.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: This is definitely not a point of order. This is debate.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Turning this into cheap, political gamesmanship is absolutely inappropriate. It's disgusting. It's a waste of committee resources. To the Bloc member's point, it turns this committee into a joke.

For all of the reasons I just listed, there's just no way I could support the amendment that has been brought forward by the member.

I would move a motion to adjourn the committee.

The Chair: I will call the question on adjourning, although it is now actually the exact time the meeting is meant to end, as I was told by the clerk, so I will actually suspend the meeting.

An hon. member: What?

An hon. member: Why are you suspending?

The Chair: Because we have a motion on the floor that's not finished. However, if you wish to vote against the suspension or for the adjournment, I will ask the clerk—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, you can't suspend unilaterally.

The Chair: We have a vote to adjourn.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: You need consensus.

The Chair: It's not debatable. We'll have a vote.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, on a point of order, I moved a motion. You have to go immediately to a vote on the motion that I moved.

The Chair: I am just about to ask the clerk to do that, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: No, Madam Chair. You just suspended.

The Chair: Go ahead.

As it was pointed out to the chair earlier on, when I am speaking, a red light goes on and all the sound coming through my earpiece is completely lost. This was on, and I did not hear what you said, so I moved to suspend.

Thank you. I'm sorry about that. I was looking at the clock as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Now we'll vote on the adjournment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair—

[*English*]

The Clerk: To confirm, the meeting has risen.

The Chair: The meeting has now reached its end point here, and the motion to adjourn is not debatable, so the meeting is adjourned.

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