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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 32 of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. Members can attend in person, in the room, or remotely using the Zoom application, but we have everyone here in person today.

Before you speak, please wait until I recognize you by name. A reminder that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair.

Today's meeting will focus on committee business. I see that Blake Richards, the committee's first vice-chair, already has his hand up.

The floor is yours, Mr. Richards.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I indicated with my notice at the last meeting, I will move the motion. I can read it into the record again just for clarity's sake. I'll then give some explanation as to the rationale behind the motion, and then I would be interested in hearing the comments of my colleagues.

The motion reads:

That, Pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee order:

That all briefing notes, memos, emails and text or other electronic messages from Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) officials prepared for or sent to the Minister of Veterans Affairs regarding medical assistance in dying (MAiD), including related to the internal investigation into the matter, be provided to the committee within 30 days of the adoption of this motion.

That all internal memos, emails and documents distributed by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) to veterans service agents and caseworkers regarding the department's policy on discussing medical assistance in dying (MAiD) between January 1, 2019, and December 7, 2022, be provided to the committee within 30 days of the adoption of this motion.

That any notes, memos, emails, and documents related to the deletion or destruction of phone calls, emails, messages and client notes related to the subject of medical assistance in dying (MAiD) (providing for the redaction of names and personal information of veterans and VAC clients) between July 1, 2022, and December 7, 2022, be provided to the committee within 30 days of the adoption of this motion.

That all Assystnet requests by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) employees to delete client notes related to medical assistance in dying (MAiD) (providing for the redaction of names and personal information of veterans and VAC clients) between July 1, 2022, and December 7, 2022, be provided to the committee within 30 days of the adoption of this motion.

I move that motion.

Let me give a bit of explanation as to what we're talking about.

I'll go point by point. The first point is fairly self-explanatory. On the briefing notes, memos, emails and other messages Veterans Affairs Canada officials have prepared for or sent to the Minister of Veterans Affairs regarding this issue, this is obviously there to ensure this committee has the benefit of the information that has been provided. It seems as though in the meetings we've had on this issue, when the minister or officials have been here, we've received a lot of different stories. The story seems to change. Even within one meeting itself, the story changed numerous times.

It's important that this committee have the benefit of understanding exactly what information Veterans Affairs officials have provided to the minister and in relation to the investigation itself, because even within the meeting there seemed to be questions and there seemed to be a real inability by the minister and his officials to clarify exactly what the status of the investigation is. Hopefully the documents we're asking for here will shed some light on the status of that investigation, what is happening with that investigation, what has been learned and obviously the issue itself. I won't spend a lot of time there other than to say that.

The second part of the motion is again an attempt to determine whether there has been any kind of direction given. We hear from numerous veterans. The minister has admitted that there are four cases, and we have heard of at least four others. Unfortunately, in the case of these veterans, they lack trust toward Veterans Affairs. Therefore, in a couple of cases the veterans are not willing to come forward publicly, and in a couple of others they are willing to come forward but are uncomfortable doing so in a place they feel is not safe for them. It's really unfortunate that that's the case, but I can understand it.

• (1110)

When we start to get into this matter—and we are starting to hear about as many as eight cases that we're aware of—and we look at these cases, it's very difficult to imagine that what we're being told, which is that it's confined to one caseworker, is accurate and truthful. First of all, what we're hearing from Christine Gauthier is that she was given this suggestion by two different caseworkers, one male and one female. Right there, there's no way that could be one individual.

Then, when we start to look at where these individuals are located in the country, it's very unlikely that they're all working with the same office. That would again indicate that there's not a chance this could be just one individual. It really seems unlikely that that's the case.

However, the stories we've heard, and I've heard some of them through the media and some of them through what the minister has told us, all have a very similar pattern to them. The conversation has gone in a very similar way. It makes one wonder how that could have been. I think it's important to see what kind of information has been given to employees.

Further to that, it would be important to see what kind of information has been given to employees since this became public. Even asking for something as simple as information about what the standard operating procedures are at Veterans Affairs for the recording of calls yielded something that was far less than what we asked for. It was almost as though it were something that someone just typed up in a Word document to explain to the committee why they didn't want to give us what we were asking for.

It just seems odd. I think it's important that we have the information that is available that wasn't provided to the committee through our previous requests.

In relation to the last couple of points, talking about the deletion or destruction of phone calls and messages related to the incident request, we are talking about a much shorter period of time. The reason for this is that when this became public—I believe it was early August—there had been some rumblings about it prior to that, in my understanding. Therefore, I have chosen the date of July 1 just for that reason, to include that period of time when it was sort of being rumbled about publicly. One could easily imagine why someone might want to modify a file, had they made a similar suggestion to a veteran.

No one here is looking to have the personal information of veterans. I want to make that very clear right now. I have made that clear in the motion by indicating “providing for the redaction of names and personal information of veterans and VAC clients”. Nobody needs to have the personal information of a veteran who has had this offer made to them. I want to make that very clear. That is not what anyone is seeking here. This is simply to try to determine whether these kinds of requests have been made.

If that hasn't happened, and one hopes it hasn't—we all would hope that hasn't happened—then there really isn't going to be much here for Veterans Affairs to provide. Let's hope that's the case. Let's hope there's nothing they need to provide here and that nobody has tried to cover their tracks, so to speak. However, if someone has in fact done that, I think it's important that this committee know about it.

• (1115)

We're clearly not getting all the information here from the minister or his officials at the present time, and we've had them come before our committee about what is transpiring here.

I'm not suggesting that any of this has occurred, but simply that we should know if it has. It may be that there is nothing that needs

to be provided here, but if there is something, well, it's important that this committee be aware of it. It feels to me that if we're going to get to the bottom of this and what has happened, this committee's going to have to be a part of making that happen.

That's what's being requested here, that information.

Perhaps I'll leave it at that right now and see what others have to say. I may want to speak some more to it based on what I hear. I will move the motion and leave it open for discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Before I go to Ms. Blaney, in the third and fourth paragraphs of that motion you are asking about the deletion or destruction of documents, and things like that. Can you give us some explanation? Do you think that the minister has backup? If that information and those documents were deleted, how will they be able to provide those notes, memos and emails? Can you give us a bit of an explanation about what you're looking for, please?

Mr. Blake Richards: What we'd be talking about here, obviously, is that if something has been deleted, there would have to have been some communication about that happening. My understanding of the process, for example, for either a service agent or a case manager to remove something from a client's file is that there has to be a request. There has to be an email sent requesting it, and there would be confirmation that would come back. If that request has been made, there would be some kind of backup documentation, whether it be an email or otherwise, that the request was made. It would indicate that the information had been deleted.

That would then indicate that there may be more that we aren't aware of that has occurred here. I hope there will be nothing that will come from either of these two things. If there is, it would indicate to this committee that there's a bigger scope to this than we believe.

It's quite important to have that information. It's not to get the clients' or the veterans' personal information or to even see the contents of their files. It's to simply know whether requests have been made to delete from a file something about medical assistance in dying.

The Chair: That's great. Thanks.

Now I'd like to go to Ms. Blaney.

You have no limited time. The floor is yours.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Wow. Let me think of all of the things I've always wanted to say. I think today is the day.

I will not do that, because I know that at the end of the day, what we really care about is protecting veterans and making sure they feel safe and heard.

I have no problem supporting this. I don't know that it will be the answer that will give us a solution, but I think it's a step along the way. In the long term, we just have to find a way to get this done and cleared up, and make sure that veterans feel safe. That may take a little time. I think the committee is part of it but may not be the whole solution. I'm definitely putting some time into thinking about that.

At this point I think it's fine. I guess one question I would have, not so much for Blake but maybe through you to the clerk, Chair, is this. Do the dates make sense? I think 30 days seems fairly reasonable, but I acknowledge that we won't be back in the House until the end of January. It might behoove us if we could hear from the clerk if those dates make sense or if we want to maybe look at having them be just before we get to committee, a week before. I want to clarify those dates.

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you.

I just looked at the clerk. They said that it's up to the committee to make the request. We'll live with that.

I'd like to go to Mrs. Cathay Wagantall.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I also, obviously, support our going forward with this. I have a great deal of concern around how our veterans are feeling in regard to this issue—either those who have come forward saying that they have been approached or those who are now considering something they should not even be considering.

It's important that we get as much information as we can as a committee to assist us in bringing this issue to an end for our veterans. The level of sanctuary trauma that they were experiencing prior to the breakout of this news and this circumstance is just that much greater. It's always tougher, too, going into the Christmas season.

I think it would be important to them to know that we're on this and we are doing our best to get the details, so that we know what's happened.

I also want to say something in regard to case managers and service managers. We've had some come and testify here who clearly showed a great deal of commitment to veterans on a very personal level, as well as a huge commitment to their responsibilities and what they do. I think it's important, too, that we find out the dynamics around these circumstances, because many of them, I'm sure, are apprehensive about either coming forward or being considered as party to something that for many of them, I hope and feel, is not the case.

The depth that we've gone into here is significant, but it's necessary. I believe it's the best thing we could possibly do for our veterans so that we get clarity and an end to this unfortunate and frightening circumstance that they find themselves in.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Wagantall.

Who else would like to debate this motion?

Mr. Sean Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Let me start by saying I'll be supporting the motion, but some of the comments made by Mr. Richards cannot go unchallenged.

He stated that the department has changed its story several times. That is not true. The department officials changed their testimony when new evidence came to light after the original testimony was given.

He said that the status of the investigation is unclear. It isn't. The officials have testified unequivocally with respect to the status of the investigation.

He indicated that there are numerous veterans—at least four others. Well, if there are, that has not been presented to the committee. Maybe there are. Maybe there are people talking to Mr. Richards who have chosen not to come before the committee, or who have chosen not to come before the committee and provide anything to corroborate what they've said. That may be so but, to quote the minister, we can deal only in facts.

He says we're starting to hear about at least eight other cases. Maybe he's starting to hear about eight other cases, but the committee isn't. He says he's connecting stories through what the minister has told us and through what the media have told us. The minister has also been unequivocal with respect to having to deal in facts. He's been unequivocal in saying that what has happened is entirely unacceptable. To enter into the realm of speculation and then to repeat it so many times as to make it sound like fact is completely unfair.

The motion is reasonable. The motion is one that deserves to be supported. The narrative and the speculation that are being produced without substantiation can't be allowed to stand untested.

There was a suggestion that one could imagine why someone might alter a file. Wow.

Everyone's entitled to their own opinion, but they're not entitled to their own facts. In my view, they're not entitled to do a drive-by smear of the people who work at Veterans Affairs. That can't go unchallenged.

As I said, I'll be supporting the motion. I will be quite interested in hearing—

• (1125)

The Chair: Excuse me.

On a point of order, I have Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I have a point of order, because it's important, much like Mr. Casey is trying to suggest here, that we stick to the facts. I want to make it clear that what we're talking about is not an insinuation that something has occurred, or any kind of—

Mr. Sean Casey: That's not a point of order. That's a point of argument.

Mr. Blake Richards: It's important that we remain factual. What I'm indicating is that no one was indicating that there was any belief that Veterans Affairs employees had done this, but that it was only a matter of determining if it had happened. It was very clear that everyone here, including me, would hope it's not true—

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Chair, it's not a point of order. Mr. Casey had the floor, so I think you should respect that—

The Chair: Mr. Richards, you will have time to respond to Mr. Casey, but now I'd like to go back to—

Mr. Sean Casey: The comment to which I am responding was that one could imagine why someone might alter a file. Is that fair?

The last thing I want to say is this, and it is more in the form of a question to you, Mr. Chair, the clerk or Mr. Richards.

A motion was adopted by this committee to have the veteran known as “Bruce” come before the committee before December 14 and be allowed to testify in public in a manner that protected his identity. Could someone inform us of the status of that request, now that we are almost at December 14?

Christine Gauthier testified that she was offered medical assistance in dying in writing by Veterans Affairs. Mr. Richards asked that the letter be produced. Has it been produced?

Ms. Gauthier also indicated that she had complained about this in writing to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Have we asked for and have we received those things?

This is all consistent with, to quote Mr. Richards, trying to stick to the facts and what's before the committee.

I'll be supporting the motion, but I think the justification for the motion, as elucidated by Mr. Richards, contains a lot of things that shouldn't go unchallenged. That's the sole purpose of my intervention. I'll still be voting for the motion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

To answer your questions, first of all, I remember that the motion regarding the veteran “Bruce” was for today, until December 12. We are here today and I think this motion.... Just a second.

For the second one, maybe you're going to answer it, so I'm going to start with Mr. Richards and then go to Ms. Blaney.

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: First of all, I thank Mr. Casey for his support for the motion.

I want to be clear that in no way was I trying to cast aspersions on the department, the minister or anyone else. I was simply indicating that it's important that we have all the information. That was really what I was getting at.

There certainly was confusion—I know it was not just in my mind—about what the story actually was, especially the first time the minister was here. I don't think—I'm not even indicating that someone was trying to not give us the whole story, but I felt like there was a lot of confusion that was left, and I think getting this information will help to clear up some of that confusion.

I apologize if my remarks seemed to suggest otherwise.

With regard to the question, I don't know that I can provide much assistance in terms of Ms. Gauthier and what she has provided and

not provided. That might be something that is better answered by the clerk.

However, I can provide some more information about the motion and about the veteran who was referred to as Bruce.

He reached out to me personally and indicated that he wanted to have the opportunity to tell his story here. Following the adoption of the motion, I think he has had some concerns about the effect on his mental health. I brought it up at the last meeting that the five-minute thing is something I know many veterans have expressed concern about, for example. Perhaps if he was offered the opportunity to testify for longer, he might potentially reconsider, but he is in a place right now where he just isn't sure that it would be a good thing for his mental health to come before the committee.

That may change in the future. It's hard to say. If it does, I'm sure he'll inform us, and I'm sure the committee would indulge him and provide him that opportunity. However, at this point, I don't expect it to happen before December 14.

Hopefully, that gives a bit more clarity on that.

● (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

Yes, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: On a point of order, Chair, my colleague asked the clerk to give us feedback on the request, as did Mr. Richards. We'd like to hear from the clerk.

The Chair: Yes. Exactly. That's what I'm going to do.

I will invite the clerk to say a few words about Mrs. Gauthier, please.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Audrée Dallaire): We didn't hear back from Ms. Gauthier. I would be glad to follow up with her, if the committee wishes, but I haven't received a call or an email from her since she appeared before the committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Blaney will be first, and then it will be Mr. Desilets.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I just want to make sure. I thought I had clarified this last meeting, but it was in camera. Now we get a chance to do it publicly. I'm sorry about that.

What I understand is this. The testimony from Ms. Gauthier was translated into English, and there was a bit of a miscommunication. I understand that she said in French—I will leave it to the clerk to tell me if I am correct—that she had received from somebody working with her through Veterans Affairs the offer of MAID, and that she had written a letter. She did not actually receive a letter from the department, but she had been offered it verbally. She then wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, talking about that.

I just want to make sure that's clear. Mr. Casey talked about a letter from the department. I thought that was the case as well, from listening to the interpretation, but I was told later on that it was not the case. I think it is important that we have that officially on the record.

The second thing is around this veteran called Bruce, for very important reasons. If there's a motion that Blake is planning to bring forward to increase the time for the testimony, and maybe a different process, I welcome it. I would be happy to look at supporting something like that to make this a more friendly environment for a veteran to come forward in.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

The clerk will give an answer.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: To address Ms. Blaney's point, I can say that, as a francophone, I understood the same thing from Ms. Gauthier as Ms. Blaney just explained.

The Chair: We will now go to the second vice-chair, Mr. Desilets.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): I wanted to provide some more information, but Ms. Blaney summarized the situation rather well.

A letter was written, but it wasn't from the department or the Prime Minister. Ms. Gauthier wrote the letter to complain about the situation. I received a copy, but I didn't even bother to share it with the committee members because it didn't add anything to the debate. In her letter, she complained about how long she was having to wait for services, mainly the elevator she needed because of her disability, and she asked whether they wanted her to submit a MAID request. No one offered her such assistance.

When she was here, with her big case, I asked her whether she had any of her own notes that she could share for the purposes of our discussion, because she writes everything down. She could have written down that she had received a phone call when she had been offered something, for instance. It's been about 10 days since we met with her. We've followed up twice, but we haven't received anything. That's where we are with Ms. Gauthier, and we were in close contact with her.

Now I'd like to turn to the motion on the table. I read it with my assistant on the weekend. We went over it with a fine-tooth comb. To be perfectly frank, I was completely against the motion at first, but sometimes I can be sensible. I opened a bottle of wine, and after one glass, we put together an amendment of sorts.

• (1135)

Mr. Darrell Samson: I should remind the member that this meeting is public.

Mr. Luc Desilets: I'll put the member's mind at ease.

We drafted an amendment, a compromise, if you will.

We heard of four cases in which veterans were offered medical assistance in dying, but again, we don't have anything concrete. That is not to minimize the situation whatsoever. I really don't want to cast aspersions on the four individuals who raised the issue, but we have nothing concrete. We couldn't have the courts hear any of these cases, so that's why I'm a bit in the middle.

The committee has a host of topics to examine. At a certain point, we have to prioritize some issues and drop others. That is not to minimize the four—potentially eight—cases, but we don't have anything concrete at this time.

We asked for an extension, and if anyone wants to come forward, the door is wide open. I think people understand that the committee can discuss these issues in camera, so that their names are not revealed, if they want to stay anonymous. There are definitely ways of doing things to keep all of this strictly confidential. That is why we are spending longer on this study than initially planned, and we may be surprised, but so far, nothing.

I have an amendment to propose. I assume you and the clerk received it, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have to move the amendment first, and then, the clerk will send it out.

Mr. Luc Desilets: My amendment is very simple. I'd like to get to the truth, without exhausting the committee's bandwidth or that of department staff.

The holidays are around the corner, and it's obvious that the deadline Mr. Richards is proposing in his motion isn't reasonable. I discussed it with the Conservative member. I would suggest February 1, 2023, to give staff a bit of breathing room.

In a nutshell, I would keep the first paragraph of the member's motion, but remove two parts: “or sent to” and “regarding Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD), including related to the internal investigation into the matter.” Why? Because the internal investigation is entirely confidential. We put questions to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and his deputy ministers, but we won't get a response because the investigation is confidential. It's in the hands of the RCMP.

I think removing those two portions of the paragraph may give the motion a bit more credibility, instead of the committee asking for information it may or may not get.

In addition, I would propose a deadline of 45 days, instead of 30. In the second paragraph of Mr. Richards' motion, I would put “within 45 days”, which would give the department until February 1, 2023.

Lastly, I would remove the third and fourth paragraphs of the motion. Why? Perhaps it's naive, but something seems wrong to me. It doesn't quite make sense that an agent or case manager who wrote incorrect information in their notes and then deleted it would make a note somewhere that they deleted the information. I really don't agree with the third and fourth paragraphs of the motion because they are based on an assumption that doesn't make sense.

Let's be honest. Like anyone, a public servant wants to cover themselves, but they wouldn't destroy their notes. They would keep them in case a problem came up later and they needed to justify their actions. Getting rid of information is a pretty serious thing, and I don't really think that happens in the public service, including in this situation. Again, I may be naive, here, but we would have to go through a ton of boxes and redacted documents.

I'll summarize my amendment. I propose keeping the first and second paragraphs of Mr. Richards' motion, with the couple of minor changes I mentioned, and removing the third and fourth paragraphs.

Again, if we really had evidence to back up a request for more information from the department, I would be all for it. However, we are talking about four cases that are hard to prove, even though we shouldn't disregard them.

That's what I'm proposing in my amendment. We will also have a very simple motion to put forward.

• (1140)

The Chair: All right.

Your amendment is now up for debate, Mr. Desilets. I gather that you want to remove the third and fourth paragraphs of Mr. Richards' motion and that, in the second paragraph, you want to replace "30 days" with "45 days".

As for your changes to the first paragraph, would you mind reading it in full, from the beginning, without the portions you're removing?

Mr. Luc Desilets: I didn't want to take up too much time.

The first paragraph, as amended, would read as follows:

That all briefing notes, memos, emails, and text or other electronic messages from Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) officials prepared for the Minister of Veterans Affairs be provided to the Committee within 45 days of the adoption of this motion (February 1, 2023).

The Chair: Great. Thank you.

Mr. Desilet's amendment is now up for debate.

We'll go to Fraser Tolmie now.

[*English*]

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this.

I've sat on this committee for over a year now. Two things I've recognized across the aisle are that this committee has a responsibility to do its due diligence. Further, this committee has prided itself on addressing and dealing with some issues that may be messy.

I have to say that I will not be supporting the amendments here, because I think that it would be half a job. I think we would be letting veterans down. As I've said, it might be a bit messy, but we have to find out where the problems lie and where they stem from.

Further, the content of the overall motion that was brought forward has two components to it. There's the freedom of information that the public should be entitled to, but there's also the protection of privacy. I think that the motion that was first presented protects individual rights. We have to recognize that. Protecting names and understanding that as a government is also a responsibility. Quite often, people in the public forget about that. They think it's just the freedom of information.

I think what my colleague Mr. Richards has brought forward is something that is well rounded. It is quite large and encompassing, but it is the responsibility of this committee to protect veterans. Unfortunately, sometimes there are things that are missed. I believe that Mr. Desilets' amendments would be adding missing key components to find out what's going on within this department.

I cannot support it. I appreciate his intervention. I think that we really need to have a full understanding of what is going on from start to finish, so I will not be supporting his amendment.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tolmie.

Now we have Mrs. Wagantall.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you, Chair.

Yes, I have concerns, Mr. Desilets, about deleting those last two, because I heard a lot of confusion around the issues as to whether or not phone calls were recorded in the first place. I also heard from a veteran who tried to reach out to get information about what was in that phone call. They said that it was recorded, but is now deleted because they don't keep them forever.

There are issues around communications with veterans where they are, I think, trying to find the right routes to make sure that what they're saying is corroborated and backed up, but it seems very difficult, so I think it is important that we take a look and see what has happened there.

I agree with you. I have trouble believing anything truly gets deleted in this government. It's there somewhere, most likely. I don't know. As for communications, they are deleted or they are destroyed. To a certain level, I don't question that, because we can't keep everything forever. At the same time, this is something our veterans are depending on to be able to confirm. As Mr. Casey mentioned, we need that proof. We need actual facts, and it's very difficult for them.

I can't help but think that if I was in their place—I don't know why I say that because I wouldn't have a clue—and going through what they are going through with illness, with trying to get help and with PTSD and then, in the midst of all that, being offered MAID.... I don't think my mind would be in that moment thinking that I needed to be able to corroborate, to be recording this or have all the information to be able to confirm this.

This is our way, as a committee, of possibly enabling them to get some of that information.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mrs. Wagantall.

Yes, go ahead, Mrs. Valdez.

Mrs. Rechie Valdez (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. I'm listening to the discussion. I just want some clarity. I hear what Monsieur Desilets is saying. In the third and fourth paragraphs, there's a line in brackets that says "providing for the redaction of names and personal information of veterans and VAC clients". I was wondering if you would be comfortable with—and this is more of a compromise—moving up that bracketed section, which protects our vets, to paragraphs 1 and 2. I am just offering that as a compromise between what I've been hearing and what we're debating.

The second point I want to make is that right now we have an investigation going on and so a lot of resources are being pulled to investigate these cases, and we all want to get to a resolution. I am comfortable overall with this motion, but it's going to take time and effort away from the actual investigation happening. As a committee, we should be mindful of the resources that we're pulling from the investigation. Second, between what Monsieur Desilets is saying and what we ultimately want with this motion, I just feel we should move what's in the third and fourth paragraphs up to paragraphs 1 and 2.

The Chair: Right now we are discussing the amendment. I understand this is not an amendment or a friendly amendment but just a suggestion.

Mrs. Wagantall.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: I appreciate the member's comments there. I agree that there are a lot of moving parts here. I believe Mr. Desilets mentioned moving it up to 45 days' time to be able to complete this. I agree that we need to give some more time in light of the break and also their workload.

However, I would mention that the fact they are doing an internal investigation would actually make this easier to complete, because these are things they would be including as part of the process of trying to prepare internally for that investigation. Therefore, as far as competing with our time goes, I think we would actually be well served by the time they're using right now for that internal investigation, but I would say that I support moving it to a 45-day window.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Wagantall.

We have to deal with this amendment first. If we don't have any change or any friendly amendment, we are going to have to go to a vote on the amendment presented by Mr. Desilets.

Ms. Blaney.

• (1150)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: It sounds as though there is some interest in exploring the 45-day component and not the other one, so I'm just wondering if there's a way we could separate those two things. In a vote, I would be in support of extending from 30 to 45 days. I am in support of that part, and I've heard other people say they are in support of that.

The other part, I am not in support of, so I just want to see if we could do that. I'll leave that to you, Chair. I just wanted to ask.

The Chair: Thank you.

Yes, on the same point, go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: If I can, on that same point, it sounds as though there is some feeling among some committee members to go with 45 days. I thought 30 was reasonable, but 45 is not going to change the world, and I don't see a major issue with that. However, as I think I'm hearing from others, I have some concern about removing the last couple of items that Mr. Desilets is suggesting removing.

I want to make it really clear at this point that it seems as though there might be some misunderstanding that a request is being made here for the actual client files or notes, and that's not what's being asked for. It's internal exchanges about the idea of deleting. One would hope that there are none of those and that there haven't been any of those. If there have, I think it's important that this committee know about it. That's all we're seeking here.

To clarify what Ms. Blaney was asking, it would be my understanding that the simple way to handle that, if there are people who want to see a 45-day window but not delete the last couple of items, which I feel and it sounds as though many others on the committee here feel are important to keep in, would be to simply defeat this amendment. Then someone would move an amendment to increase the deadline to 45 days subsequent to that. Would that not be the way it would be handled?

The Chair: It's up to the committee, but right now we have an amendment, so we have to vote on this amendment, and we will go back to the original motion—

Mr. Blake Richards: That's what I meant, that if we were to defeat the amendment, could someone then move for a 45-day deadline, and make that suggestion by itself as an amendment?

The Chair: Okay, let's take a short break. I'm going to consult with the clerk and I'll get back to you.

• (1150)

(Pause)

• (1250)

[Translation]

The Chair: We are now resuming.

After discussing it with the clerk, I'd like to provide some clarity.

Mr. Desilets, here's the available option. You can move an amendment to remove the last two paragraphs of the motion, and then, the committee will vote on it. Then, you can move an amendment to change the "30 days" to "45 days" in the first two paragraphs and to remove the parts of the first paragraph you want to do away with.

First, though, I'm going to give the floor to Mr. Richards.

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards: If I understand the situation correctly then, Chair, we seem to have a situation in which committee members want to support a portion of the amendment and not support the other portion.

Could we not just make the decision as a committee to split the amendment into two votes? In other words, we could have a vote on the 45-day portion and then have a separate vote on the second portion of the amendment, which would be to remove the last two bullet points. That way, committee members would be able to vote on each separately.

The Chair: I think we need to have two different amendments for that, don't we?

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes. That's what I'm suggesting, that we split it.

The Chair: Yes, so that's why I'm asking—

Mr. Blake Richards: If there's agreement, we could split it and have a vote on the 45-day portion, and then we could have a vote on the deletion of the last two bullet points separately.

The Chair: That's why I'm asking Mr. Desilets if, first of all, he can change his amendment to say the two last paragraphs, that's over, and we're going to vote on that, and after that—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: I don't want to drag this out, Mr. Chair, since I, myself, have talked about the importance of using the committee's time wisely.

I have a small question for the analyst or the clerk.

The motion refers to "documents related to the deletion or destruction of phone calls". Does the department have a system that would indicate whether someone deleted document X or Y?

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: There is no such system. That is precisely the problem I see with the third and fourth paragraphs of the motion. If those kinds of documents don't exist, why ask for them?

Thank you for that answer, Mr. Casey, but perhaps the clerk could shed some light on this for me.

[English]

The Chair: Just a second. Yes, Monsieur Paré.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher): Usually, when public servants ask for something to be deleted, whether by email or another document, they are supposed to keep that email or document. If there were any such requests in this case, I suspect they'll be fairly easy to find because I don't think we are talking about 500, here.

Mr. Luc Desilets: You are telling me that they can exist, then.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: They can exist, but obviously, there isn't a system that tracks when documents or information is deleted.

Mr. Luc Desilets: That's reassuring to hear, Mr. Paré. I wouldn't want to ask department staff to do anything that was pointless, because I have just as much respect for them as I do for veterans. If you're telling me that it shouldn't be a difficult undertaking, I will withdraw my amendment altogether. That will make things easier.

I can, however, move an amendment to change "30 days" to "45 days" in the first two paragraphs of the motion. That would give the department until February 1, 2023.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets. Please be advised that withdrawing an amendment requires unanimous consent.

Mr. Luc Desilets: I don't think it will be too hard to get.

The Chair: I see that other committee members wish to comment.

[English]

We have Madam Wagantall and then Mr. Richards.

Go ahead, please.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you, Chair.

The analyst was reading my mind. That was my concern, and we will reveal that by asking these questions, so I would encourage us to accept Mr. Desilets' recommendation and go to the vote. We're good.

The Chair: Are you good to vote on his amendment?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: On his proposal to remove the second two paragraphs and go with the 45 days....

Did I hear that right? I believe so.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Richards.

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

My understanding of what Mr. Desilets was suggesting was that he had withdrawn his previous amendment and was moving a new amendment to change all instances of "30 days" to "45 days".

I think what Ms. Wagantall is suggesting, and I would agree, is that we go to a vote on that, because it seems like there's some agreement to do that.

• (1200)

The Chair: Okay, I'm going to verify with him.

Monsieur Desilets.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Sorry, Mr. Chair, but could you please repeat what the member just said?

The Chair: Mr. Desilets, Mr. Richards was saying that he thought you were withdrawing your amendment and proposing a new one to change the deadline from “30 days” to “45 days”.

Could you please clarify what you're proposing?

Mr. Luc Desilets: Do we need unanimous consent from committee members to withdraw my first amendment?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Unfortunately, my understanding is that we don't have it.

Mr. Sean Casey: You don't have unanimous consent from the committee to withdraw your amendment, Mr. Desilets.

The Chair: All right.

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Casey: Is there unanimous consent?

The Chair: No.

Ms. Blaney, would you like to say something?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Can we call the vote, then? If it's not unanimous, let's just get 'er done.

The Chair: No, but—

Mr. Blake Richards: On a point of order, Chair, just so I'm clear, Mr. Desilets has indicated he would like to withdraw his previous amendment, so he could make the new one of just the 45-day portion, which seemed to have some support. He indicated that he understood there was a need for unanimous consent.

Did you ask for unanimous consent, then, to do that, and did we receive it?

The Chair: That's what I'm going to do right now.

Mr. Blake Richards: I misunderstood. I thought you were moving to the vote there.

The Chair: What I understand is that we have an amendment from Mr. Desilets. He wanted to remove two paragraphs and the line on the first one. Mr. Desilets would like to withdraw this amendment.

I need unanimous consent from the committee members to do that.

Mr. Sean Casey: No.

The Chair: I don't have unanimous consent on that.

Mr. Desilets, we have to debate your amendment as it is and go to—

Yes, we have Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: On a point of order, I would just to get some advice from our clerks on this. It seems as though.... I think 30 days would be reasonable, and I think it remains reasonable, but there does seem to be some support for the 45-day portion.

However, the last two points are fairly important, and I think they need to remain. It seems as though there has been some comfort provided to members of the committee who had some concern about it, namely Mr. Desilets.

Now we're put in a position by a government member's choosing not to provide unanimous consent for Mr. Desilets to remove his previous amendment and to move the new one to allow us to have the 45-day time frame. We're put in an awkward position now, because people want to support 45 days, but they would have to support removing the two bullets, which I think are important.

Can I ask the advice of the clerk on this? Is there a way, in a sub-amendment, whereby one could move to keep the last two bullet points so that the rest of his amendment could be voted on without having to take out something we don't want to take out?

The Chair: Let me explain it to you.

We don't have unanimous consent to withdraw this amendment, so now we're going to vote on the amendment. If it doesn't pass, then we're going to go back to the motion, but anyone can present a new amendment on the motion itself.

Mr. Blake Richards: To be clear, then, if any committee members want to keep the last two bullet points, we should defeat the amendment.

The Chair: Let me ask the clerk to explain this part a bit.

• (1205)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I'm a little perplexed, because Ms. Blaney called for the vote. Mr. Richards....

Excuse me, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Give me just one second. I'd like to finish with the clerk, and then I'll come back to you.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I believe I had a point of order. I was the first one to speak—

The Chair: I know.

[*Translation*]

After discussing it with the clerk, I'll explain what's happening. If Mr. Desilets's amendment is defeated, it won't be possible to move a similar amendment, specifically one that seeks to change the deadline to 45 days or remove the last two paragraphs.

Therefore, the best solution is to suggest that Mr. Desilets split his amendment in two. First, the committee would vote on the 45-day deadline, either for or against. Then, the committee would vote on removing the last two paragraphs. That way, we could keep going.

I see that committee members are talking and a consensus seems to be emerging. We have to follow the rules, so the best option would be to have Mr. Desilets split his amendment in two. That means two votes, one on the 45 days, and the other on the last two paragraphs.

You have a point of order, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make sure we're following the right process. Ms. Blaney asked for a vote, so we should vote.

I'm being interrupted, but I'm not done.

[*English*]

Mr. Richards, I haven't told him yet what my argument is, so I don't know how you can say it's not true.

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*] discussion, please.

Mr. Samson, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Basically, Ms. Blaney called for a vote, but Mr. Richards had a point of order. His comment wasn't a point of order; it was a point of debate.

Once Mr. Richards was done, I think we should have proceeded with the vote. That is the point I'm trying to make.

The Chair: All right.

I understand all that, but as has been pointed out, what matters to the committee is working on behalf of veterans. We want to come to an agreement amongst ourselves.

I want to make clear that some members are in favour of deleting the last two paragraphs and most members are in favour of the 45-day deadline. Yes, we could go ahead and vote on the amendment, as proposed. What that would mean, though, is that, if the amendment were defeated, the committee could not then vote on the 45-day deadline or the removal of the last two paragraphs.

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

• (1210)

[*English*]

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

If I understand correctly, your ruling is that we're going to hold a vote on the two elements separately, the 45 days and then the removal of the last two paragraphs. If that's the case, I'm comfortable with moving the vote. If not, I will have more to say.

The Chair: First of all, Mr. Desilets has the floor. He has to propose that and have unanimous consent to go on that.

[*Translation*]

What do you plan to do, Mr. Desilets?

Mr. Luc Desilets: I don't want to drag out the debate, Mr. Chair, but I want to stick with the 45-day deadline. I've given it a lot of thought, and that's what I want to do. That's the purpose of my amendment.

That said, I'm willing to keep discussing the deadline. Someone mentioned 40 days earlier. Is it really necessary to consider a 40-day deadline? Do we really want to give the department less time? If so and if that's what everyone wants, I understand that I can split my amendment in two.

If not, my personal preference is to keep the amendment as is. The deadline is important, but it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world if my amendment were defeated.

The Chair: If I understand correctly, Mr. Desilets, you want to change the first paragraph by removing the parts you mentioned and changing the deadline to 45 days. You would like the committee to vote on your amendment as proposed.

Mr. Luc Desilets: It's not a major issue, Mr. Chair.

If that will get everyone on board and make everyone happy, I'm a fellow who strives for consensus whenever possible.

I would like to ask Mr. Richards, though, whether he's okay with the 45 days.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: My only concern is having to vote on both parts together, because I think there is some agreement. I was still comfortable with 30, but I'm comfortable with 45 as well.

My suggestion would be that we split the vote. I think you can make that suggestion, so we can have one vote on the 45-day portion—I would be comfortable supporting that—and one vote, a separate vote, on the removal of the last two paragraphs, which I wouldn't support.

That would allow committee members to have a vote on the two elements separately, so that if someone wants to support one, they can support it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Here's where I stand. I don't have a problem with that.

We can vote on the amendment as received. We can delete the third and fourth paragraphs from the motion, and we can talk about the deadline after.

I am therefore calling for the vote. After that, we'll have an amendment and we can vote on the 30-day deadline. Is that right?

The Chair: No, Mr. Desilets. With the committee members' consent, the first vote will be on changing the first two paragraphs by replacing "30 days" with "45 days" and removing the parts you wanted to remove. The second vote will be on removing the last two paragraphs from the motion.

I will now call the vote on the first part of Mr. Desilets's amendment, which deals with the first two paragraphs. The words "30 days" would be replaced with "45 days", and the segments "or sent to" and "regarding Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD), including related to the internal investigation into the matter," would be removed.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: It will be a problem if you add them.

The Chair: No, they are being removed.

The first two paragraphs would refer to 45 days, instead of 30, and the segments "or sent to" and "regarding Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD), including related to the internal investigation into the matter," would be removed from the first paragraph.

I have called the vote. Does anyone object to the amendment as proposed?

• (1215)

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm a bit confused now.

The Chair: Okay. Let's reread it.

Mr. Blake Richards: My understanding was we were simply going to have a vote on 45 days, and then we were going to have a separate vote on removing the last two paragraphs. I didn't know there was some new substance being added.

The Chair: Mr. Desilets has a paragraph on the first item. He said we should remove....

[Translation]

the segments "or sent to" and "regarding Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD), including related to the internal investigation into the matter,".

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Chair, I believe it was "including related to the internal investigation into the matter".

[Translation]

The Chair: I've checked, and the committee is voting only on whether to replace "30 days" with "45 days" in the first two paragraphs.

[English]

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I still want to be clear. I was hearing among the committee members a desire to increase the deadline to 45 days. I didn't hear anyone arguing that they necessarily wanted to keep the deletion of the internal investigation, so my understanding is we were going to vote just on the 45-day portion—

The Chair: Exactly. We're going to vote only on the 45 days.

[Translation]

Does anyone object to adopting Mr. Desilets's amendment, which would replace "30 days" with "45 days"?

(Amendment agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: Mr. Desilets is now moving another amendment, to remove the last two paragraphs from the motion.

I will put the question on the amendment in the affirmative. Do the committee members wish to keep the last two paragraphs of the amendment?

Mr. Luc Desilets: That wasn't clear.

The Chair: I will repeat it. We have an amendment on the floor to remove the last two paragraphs from the motion.

Do the committee members wish to remove the last two paragraphs from the motion?

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'd like a recorded vote.

The Chair: I will ask the clerk to proceed with the recorded division.

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

• (1220)

The Chair: We are now back on debate of the amended motion. The first two paragraphs would be kept, and the last two would be removed.

Seeing no further comments, I'll call for the vote on the motion as amended.

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

The Chair: The motion as amended having been adopted, we will proceed accordingly.

Do the committee members wish to discuss something else or move any other motions?

Go ahead, Mr. Desilets.

Mr. Luc Desilets: As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Chair, I have a motion to put forward. It reads as follows:

That the Chair of the committee write a letter to the Veterans Ombud to suggest that she review the allegations that medical assistance in dying was offered to veterans by Veterans Affairs Canada employees.

The ombud has the authority to review certain situations. It doesn't mean that she will agree to review the allegations, but this would be a very objective way to determine whether the allegations were founded.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets. I hope everyone received your motion by email.

The motion is now up for debate.

Mrs. Wagantall, go ahead.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If I recall the minister's testimony, I believe he indicated that in addition to Veterans Affairs, the ombudsman was also engaged in this process. Is that already happening or not, already directed by...?

The Chair: We don't have any information concerning that.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I don't want to speak for the minister, but my recollection is that he said he would invite her, if she chose.... He had no problem with her getting involved in the file.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: That's her job.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes, that's her job. There's no objection.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I will now call the vote on Mr. Desilets's motion.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since the beginning, we have been wondering whether any other serious complaints were filed. If the ombud received complaints, we don't know about them. This motion may help us find out whether the ombud received complaints that are possibly different from the ones we know about.

That's all. Thank you.

The Chair: Since we are on committee business, I would like to ask the committee members whether, this Thursday, we have—

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Before you do that, Mr. Chair, I have a motion that I want to—

• (1225)

The Chair: You have a motion? Please, go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I apologize. I can't recall if this was already on notice and if members have it or not, but if not, we can make sure it's sent and distributed here.

I move:

That Veterans Affairs Canada provide the committee with the training materials and training modules that were distributed to Veterans Affairs employees to clarify the department's policy on discussing medical assistance in dying (MAiD).

Simply, it had been indicated to us that there was going to be training provided to all Veterans Affairs employees to clarify the department's policy. Obviously, it would be helpful for the committee to know what that training consisted of.

If we are going to make suggestions or recommendations following our study, it would be helpful for us to know what types of materials or training modules were provided to Veterans Affairs employees, to determine whether they were adequate to ensure what I think we all want to ensure, which is that no veteran ever has this kind of a suggestion made to them again. If we're going to do that, we need to be able to assess them. That's the rationale for asking for the materials.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards, and I think that motion was on notice, so we can discuss it and adopt it or not. It's up to the committee.

Is there any intervention on that motion from Mr. Blake Richards?

[*Translation*]

Seeing no further comments, I will call the vote on Mr. Richards' motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Now that the motion has been adopted, we are back on committee business.

I was going to say that we were supposed to have witnesses today, but those requests were still on hold because they related to Mr. Casey's employability study. I would like to know whether the committee wants the clerk to follow up on those requests, so the committee can meet with two or three witnesses at our meeting Thursday afternoon.

Go ahead, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Since we don't know exactly how things are going to go this week, I want to make sure we don't invite the witnesses only to cancel on them at the last minute.

For six of the past seven years, the House has risen by the end of Oral Questions on Thursday. I can't speak for our government in this particular case, but I wouldn't want to invite witnesses knowing there was a strong likelihood that the House could rise on Thursday, with members going back to their ridings to do that essential work.

That's just my view. I'm throwing it out there for discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

I would add that the witnesses have been waiting to meet with us for a number of meetings now, and we've been pushing back their appearances. I think it would be a good idea to discuss the matter.

The floor is yours, Mr. Richards.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: I can appreciate what Mr. Samson is saying. I certainly can, because I know there is a possibility that will be the case, but I also think it's incumbent upon us. We have very important work to do here on behalf of veterans, and there are a lot of issues that we as a committee need to deal with. If the House is still sitting, I think we should be prepared to meet. Let's not ignore the reality that there's a good chance that this meeting might not happen, if the House has risen, but I think we should also be prepared to work if the House is still sitting.

Perhaps what we could do is sort of blend this together a little—indicate to the witnesses and just be clear with them, “We would like to schedule you for this meeting, but we are going to be right up front with you that we may have to reschedule you for after Christmas,” so they know and so they're not surprised when, at the last minute, we have to tell them we can't have a meeting. However, we should be prepared to have one if the House is still sitting. Maybe we should schedule some witnesses but give them a clear understanding that it may be cancelled, because the House may rise.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards.

Before I go to Ms. Blaney, I would like to ask the clerk if she has been in contact with them since three weeks ago.

Can you give us an update on that, please?

The Clerk: The witnesses were scheduled first for early December. We had motions that meant we needed to hold meetings on other topics. The witnesses are available for this Thursday, but please note that this is the third time we're moving them, in a sense. I called them to see if they were available for Thursday. Some of them said no, and one I'm waiting for. That's where we are right now.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Well, I have to say I don't want to waste these people's time. I just think it's disrespectful to ask them that many times and then say, "Well, we might see you, but we might not."

I would say there's a lot for us to do. I certainly won't be sitting on my laurels during those times. There are a lot of other things I have to get done, but I don't want to disrespect witnesses, so I think today should probably be our last visit until the new year.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Desilets.

Mr. Luc Desilets: I agree. I'd like to ask the clerk or analyst whether there's anything else we can plan for Thursday, so we don't end up losing a meeting.

The Clerk: The next study was on the agenda for Thursday, so it's up to the committee.

Mr. Luc Desilets: I understand that, but couldn't we start work on a report?

The Chair: Speaking of reports and motions that we've just adopted, I am supposed to present the report on marriage after 60 to the House on Wednesday, so we don't have anything else on the agenda.

Which of you had your hand up first, Mr. Samson or Mr. Richards?

Mr. Darrell Samson: I had my hand up first, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm sorry, but I had my hand up first, I believe.

The Chair: I think it's Mr. Richards and then Mr. Samson.

Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: I was just going to suggest.... The one study we seem to have done nothing further on—we haven't sched-

uled other meetings or had a discussion about anything else that's required on it—would be the rehab contract. I don't know where we were with that, and whether there were others who wanted to have further meetings or anything, but if not, could we perhaps set aside committee business that day to give instructions for a report? That would give our analysts some time leading up to the end of January, when we return, to work on a report. That might be a good use of the committee's time, and it wouldn't require any witnesses to be scheduled or rescheduled.

I still appreciate and understand that there's a good chance this meeting may not happen, but if it does, it wouldn't inconvenience anybody, and we would be able to move forward a piece of committee business that's pretty important.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Samson.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That's exactly what I was going to propose. The steering committee could meet to consider the studies planned for the new year. The study we are about to wrap up is the last one that all the committee members and the steering committee had approved.

The steering committee could meet, if everyone is in agreement. We certainly don't want any time to go to waste. We are always ready to roll up our sleeves.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

We have another 25 minutes. I'm not sure whether we should go in camera, but we could use the time to give the analyst drafting instructions.

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Are you suggesting we provide instructions now? I would be prepared to do that.

I don't know if other members of the committee are, or if Thursday is a better time. I'm prepared to provide instructions—

The Chair: Do we have to go...?

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

Do we have consent to continue in camera to give the analyst drafting instructions?

Seeing no objections, I will suspend the meeting.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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