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Chair: Mr. Ken Hardie



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• (0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 35 of the House of Commons Special Committee on the Canada–People’s Republic of China Relationship.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), the committee is meeting today to discuss a request to hold meetings on the matters revealed in the Winnipeg lab documents involving the People’s Republic of China. We have some guests with us today. We have Mr. Naqvi in place of Mr. Oliphant and Mr. Bittle for Mr. Fragiskatos. I’m pleased to see Luc Berthold here for MP Seeback and Mr. Ellis for MP Lantsman. Mr. Villemure is substituting for MP Bergeron.

Of course, today’s meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. Those appearing by video conference can click on the microphone icon to activate their mics. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I will remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair. Members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hands. Members on Zoom, use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

We are here to discuss Mr. Chong’s motion. I am sure he wishes to lead off.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

I will move my motion.

[English]

I will read it out for the benefit of members of the public and for members of the committee who may be here for the first time.

Mr. Chair, I move:

That pursuant to its order of reference of Monday, May 16, 2022, the committee undertake a study of the matters revealed in the Winnipeg lab documents togeth-

er with the broader concerns they represent in relation to Canada’s national security, as well as the obstacles encountered in obtaining these documents, provided that the committee:

- (a) make this study a priority over its other business, notwithstanding the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, December 4, 2023, respecting the appearance of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance;
- (b) instruct the Chair and the clerk to take the necessary steps to arrange for two meetings of the committee each sitting week for the purposes of this study;
- (c) take into consideration the relevant evidence and documentation received by the former Special Committee on Canada-China Relations during the First and Second sessions of the 43rd Parliament;
- (d) invite and, if this invitation is not accepted, summons, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1) the following witnesses to appear, at dates and times to be fixed by the Chair:
 - (i) the Departmental Security Officer, Executive Director of Security, Public Health Agency of Canada;
 - (ii) the Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. Stephen Lucas;
 - (iii) the Vice-President, Infectious Diseases Branch, Public Health Agency of Canada, Dr. Donald Sheppard;
 - (iv) the Vice-President, National Microbiology Laboratory Branch, Public Health Agency of Canada, Dr. Guillaume Poliquin;
 - (v) the President of the Public Health Agency of Canada, Heather Jeffrey;
 - (vi) the Director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, David Vigneault; and
 - (vii) the Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council and National Security and Intelligence Adviser to the Prime Minister, Nathalie G. Drouin;
- (e) invite the following to appear on dates to be fixed by the Chair:
 - (i) the Minister of Health, the Honourable Mark Holland,
 - (ii) the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, and
 - (iii) other witnesses whose names shall be provided by the parties to the clerk of the committee within one week of the adoption of this motion; and
- (f) report its findings to the House.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to move this motion. I’m just going to speak briefly to it, so we can all have a say on the motion and get it to a vote.

We finally got the documents relating to the Winnipeg lab. My view is that this is the start of the matter, not the end. The collection of evidence is usually the start of a process, not the completion of it. Really, we’re leaving off where we left three years ago when the Canada-China committee in the previous Parliament asked for the Winnipeg lab documents.

I believe strongly that the committee is the right place to examine these documents, the right place to hold the government accountable and the right place for us to hear from witnesses and to produce a report with recommendations.

This is a grave and serious matter, as CSIS highlighted in the intelligence assessment it submitted to the Public Health Agency of Canada, an assessment that is contained in the documents we received. It's a grave and serious matter because the government scientists clandestinely collaborated with the government and the military of the People's Republic of China and were paid clandestinely by the government and the military of the People's Republic of China without the Government of Canada knowing.

These serious national security breaches, I believe, warrant examination by a parliamentary committee. It's now been four weeks since we received the documents, which is the reason, Mr. Chair, as you know I've called this emergency meeting so that we can make a decision, I hope, in favour of holding hearings on these documents. It took us three years to get the documents. It's now taken us four weeks to have a discussion about whether or not a committee should look at these documents. I think we should have done that almost immediately upon receiving the documents.

The motion in front of us will allow us to examine these serious national security breaches. It will allow us to examine the flow of information and intelligence within the Government of Canada and to get answers to questions such as the following: Why wasn't this caught earlier than September 2018? Why did it take 10 months for the government to secure the lab?

● (0855)

According to the documents, the first red flag went up in September 2018 when a patent was discovered to have been registered in the People's Republic of China, which is contrary to government policy and contrary to Canadian law. It then took 10 months for the lab to be secured, which was on July 5, 2019. In my view, it's an unacceptably long period of time to wait for that to happen.

We also need to examine why it took us three years to get the documents. The minister indicated that it was up to public servants to make the decision on what information to release to the committee. We need to examine what is wrong with the information flow between the Government of Canada and Parliament so that, in the future, when a parliamentary committee asks for these sorts of documents, they're provided forthwith in a way that protects national security, as we put in place three years ago, and not in three years.

The motion is also to examine the flow of information within the government as it relates to the most senior figures in the government—the Minister of Health, the Minister of Public Safety and the Prime Minister's Office—and to understand if the information flow within the government is working.

At the end of the day, I believe we need to hold the government accountable in this. This saga started more than three years ago. The government defied four orders of the House of Commons and its committee. It took the Speaker to court, and it disposed of these four orders by the dissolution of Parliament, which, as you know, dissolved the four orders. We cannot allow that to go unanswered and unexamined.

Finally, I'll say there was a report just today in the news that a new containment level 4 lab is being proposed in Canada. Surely we need to study this matter about the only existing level 4 lab and

its security breaches at committee before a new level 4 lab is stood up in this country that might pose security risks.

I hope that members of the committee will support the motion, and I look forward to their views on it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

We'll have a speaking order. For those on Zoom, use the “raise hand” function if you wish to weigh in on the matter.

We'll go back and forth on this one.

We'll go next to Mr. Naqvi and then to Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): I have a point of order.

I asked for the floor before Mr. Naqvi.

The Chair: The chair is going to go back and forth.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, I asked for the right to speak before Mr. Naqvi.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Naqvi can go and then you can go.

We still have plenty of time.

● (0900)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, it's not a question of time. It's a question of opportunity.

[*Translation*]

If I want to talk about my colleague's motion before the party opposite proposes amendments or anything else, I am allowed to do so. I clearly indicated that I wanted to speak before Mr. Naqvi did. If you deprive me of my right to speak at this time, you are depriving me of the opportunity to talk about this motion before another party, such as the government party, can propose amendments that may change the meaning of the motion. You saw very clearly that I asked to speak first, as the people following our proceedings could see. I even interrupted my colleague Mr. Chong to ask to speak before you turned to Mr. Naqvi.

Once again, I ask you to follow the order in which members ask to speak and to give me the floor before my colleague. That is how we usually operate in committee. I am sure that my fellow member has some very interesting things to say, but I am within my rights to insist on having the floor now.

[*English*]

The Chair: The chair has the option to recognize people in the order that he sees them.

As I look at Mr. Naqvi, I suggest that there are probably going to be amendments.

Mr. Berthold, I take your point that you wish to support Mr. Chong's motion before we get into looking at amendments, so I will give you the floor, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for recognizing the importance of following the order.

As I mentioned in my brief remarks, I am speaking today in support of the motion by my fellow member Michael Chong regarding the importance for this committee to undertake a study on the documents related to the Winnipeg lab affair, which were made public four weeks ago. As my colleague said, the tabling of the documents or the fact that we have them in our hands does not signal the end of this matter, but only the beginning. In the last Parliament, we worked very hard to obtain the documents so we could refer to them to ask those responsible about what really happened in this situation, which led to the expulsion of two researchers from the level-4 lab in Winnipeg, Canada's highest-security lab.

It is all the more important for us to shed light on this because we learned today in the newspapers that a new level-4 laboratory may be coming into operation shortly in Canada. To prevent what happened at the Winnipeg lab from happening again in the new facility, we must get to the bottom of these events, which led the government to disregard four parliamentary orders to produce the documents. The Prime Minister took the House of Commons to court, something that has never before happened in Canadian history. He even went so far as to call an election to avoid responding to the order from Parliament to produce the documents.

Here we are several years later with the documents in question. It is important, as my colleague's motion states, that we be able to study what is in the documents, ask questions about why it took so long to get them and find out what in them may have compromised national security.

The motion seeks to have “the committee undertake a study of the matters revealed in the Winnipeg lab documents together with the broader concerns they represent in relation to Canada's national security, as well as the obstacles encountered in obtaining these documents”. I won't read the entire motion, but I would just like to mention that there are two categories of witnesses we want to invite.

First, there are witnesses who would be invited to appear here to answer the committee's questions and who would be summoned to appear if they did not accept the invitation. They are the departmental security officer and executive director of security at the Public Health Agency of Canada; the deputy minister of health, Dr. Stephen Lucas; the vice-president of the infectious diseases branch of the Public Health Agency of Canada, Dr. Donald Sheppard; the vice-president of the national microbiology laboratory branch of the Public Health Agency of Canada, Dr. Guillaume Poliquin; the president of the Public Health Agency of Canada, Heather Jeffrey; the director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, David Vigneault; and the deputy clerk of the Privy Council and national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister, Nathalie G. Drouin.

The witnesses in the other category would be invited to appear on dates to be set by you. They are the Minister of Health, the Honourable Mark Holland; the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc; and other witnesses whose names come up in the discussions and revelations that emerge during the study. I will talk later about why we absolutely must hear from Mr. Holland. Finally, the motion calls for the committee to report its findings to the House.

I'm going to go through the first couple of questions, just to put the debate in context for people. After the first red flag was raised in September 2018, when a patent was filed in China by one of the two researchers in question, Dr. Qiu, it took 10 months to secure the Winnipeg laboratory. From September 2018 to July 2019, these two researchers remained in the lab, even though the agency was aware of the situation. We need to know why—

• (0905)

[*English*]

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Berthold. We are here to actually discuss the motion and the terms on which the study is to proceed. It's a little bit early on in the process to get into the evidence part. I think what we're really here to do this morning is to discuss the mechanics of how we will undertake this study.

I'm sure you have a great depth of information to provide on the evidentiary side. I would draw your attention to the purpose of this meeting, which is to really get the motion in a position where we can go forward on the study. It's the mechanics of the motion that we're here to discuss today, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, today we need to debate the motion moved by Mr. Michael Chong so that we can undertake a study. It is important for people to know why this motion was moved and for my colleagues from all parties to know the motivations behind the motion.

As I said, I'm going to be very quick, because I only have a few minutes left. It took 10 months to secure the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg. We need to know when the Prime Minister was informed of the situation at the lab.

I will talk later about the appearance of the Minister of Health. We need to know when the Minister of Health was informed of the situation at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg to ensure that it won't happen again, as I mentioned earlier.

We have some serious questions for the Public Health Agency of Canada. We had to wait three years before getting information that turned out not to put the country's national security at risk. The Minister of Health, Mr. Holland, confirmed that he was not responsible for the unnecessary redaction of documents from the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg. That is why we are inviting representatives from the Public Health Agency of Canada to find out why they decided to redact the documents and not allow Canadians to see them.

Minister Holland said that no employees of the Public Health Agency of Canada would be held responsible and that nothing had been transferred from the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China. We're seeking clarification on those statements.

As I mentioned, after all the attempts made by this Parliament and the last to obtain these documents, we have a duty to study them now that we have them in hand. It is the role of the parliamentarians here to ask all the questions required to shed light on the matter at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

Again, to those who may wish to speak, we're here to talk about the mechanics of what we're to do. The evidence, I'm sure, will be fascinating, and I will be as interested as you to find out exactly what happened and why.

Now we will recognize Mr. Naqvi.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning colleagues. It's a pleasure to join you here this morning in Ottawa.

I want to start by saying that this is a very important issue. That is why the government has been quite diligent in making sure that there is utmost transparency when it comes to these documents so that Canadians can understand what exactly happened at the national microbiology lab.

I find it quite unfortunate that it was the official opposition that dragged its feet in terms of participating in a process that would have allowed for the disclosure of these important documents. First, at NSICOP, by withdrawing their own members and not engaging in a pre-existing process to deal precisely with such issues by members of Parliament from all political parties and the Senate.

Given the seriousness of this issue, the government took another step, which was to create the ad hoc committee that allowed for members from all political parties to work together and be able to then disclose those documents in a manner that maintains important aspects of national security and also provides for the transparency that is important.

Foreign interference is an attack on democracy and on each and every member of the House and of this committee. That's why it's important that we deal with this issue in all seriousness. This cannot turn into a political show. This cannot turn into a process where members are trying to just score political points. This is about foreign interference. This is about national security. All of us have an important and a serious obligation to treat all of these matters very seriously.

I can tell you from my experience that, just last week in the health committee, theatrics were at play from the opposition. Official opposition members accused the Minister of Health of treason and engaged in name-calling, which was highly unnecessary and undermined the seriousness of this process.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, I would like to move an amendment to the motion. It does two things.

First, it scopes the duration of this study to two meetings, while requesting all the witnesses that have been outlined in Mr. Chong's motion. All witnesses named in the motion, we feel, could fit easily into two regular meetings. At the end of the day, if the committee determines that more meetings are needed, as usual, we can schedule more meetings at that time or add more witnesses. That's the first aim of the amendment that I will be proposing shortly.

Second, we're proposing to remove the summons aspect that's been outlined in this motion. As typical, our process is to invite witnesses as a first step. If a witness refuses to appear, then a summons can be issued. There is no need to have that in place in the motion. We expect that witnesses will appear willingly given the seriousness of this issue.

Chair, with this in mind, I would like to move the following amendments. They are not too extensive, so it should be easy to follow for all members.

Number one is to insert the words, "two meetings" after the words the "committee undertake a study of". Number two is to delete clause (b). Number three is to remove the words, "and, if this invitation is not accepted, summons, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)" from clause (d). Finally, number four is to remove clause (c)(iii).

• (0910)

These are the four simple changes that we are proposing in this motion. If the chair and members like, I can read the entire motion as it would read with the amendments, or I can repeat myself. I also have copies in English and French, if you'd like me to provide them to you, which may make things a bit easier.

• (0915)

The Chair: Mr. Naqvi, we'll need to process these one at a time.

I'm going to suspend for a moment so that copies in both official languages can be distributed and to give an opportunity for everybody to read and get their head around what's being proposed.

I'll suspend for, let's say, five minutes.

• (915)

(Pause)

• (920)

The Chair: I will call the meeting back to order.

I am going to go back to Mr. Naqvi, who, I believe, had one more thing to add that he did not include in his comments.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Chair.

My sincere apologies to all the members because I forgot to mention that the amendments we have sent and that you have in front of you also remove clause (a). That's it.

Thank you. There are five changes.

The Chair: Again, this really focuses on the mechanics of acting on the motion. I think it's probably best that we handle these one at a time.

Mrs. Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I don't want to get into a debate on this, but since the changes were presented in a fairly easy-to-follow order, and in the interest of time, I really think that we could deal with them all at once, rather than one at a time.

That said, I have a great deal of respect for you and I don't mean to tell you what to do.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

With all due respect to my colleague, I would prefer that we deal with them separately. I'm acting as a substitute for a member of the committee, so I'd prefer to study them individually rather than as a whole.

[*English*]

The Chair: Very good. If that's the will of the committee, then that's the way we will proceed.

I do have a speaking order on the amendments, then. We'll start with the first one.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to be clear, you've broken it into four amendments. Is that correct?

The Chair: That's correct.

Hon. Michael Chong: We're on the amendment that would strike clause (a). Is that correct?

The Chair: I believe it's to include "two meetings".

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's recognizing that normally we set a number of meetings.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes. I'll speak to that amendment.

I do not support the amendment. Two meetings are not sufficient to examine this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

In the spirit of my fellow member's comment, I think we should still propose at least two meetings. I think there is a good chance that two meetings will not be enough, based on the list of witnesses

we have and the ones we might add afterwards. We need at least two meetings. I am proposing a subamendment, and it will be sent in writing shortly.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think the subamendment is fairly clear. It's just to include the words "at least".

I will look to Mr. Naqvi to see if he would recognize this as a friendly amendment. If so, we can dispense with that.

Mr. Naqvi.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: You have my sincere apologies. I missed Mr. Villemure's—

The Chair: Mr. Villemure is suggesting that we add the words "at least two meetings". That's a subamendment to your amendment.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Could you suspend and give me a moment?

• (0925)

The Chair: Sure. Yes.

• (0925)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (0925)

The Chair: All right. We're back, Mr. Naqvi.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: We will accept that as a friendly amendment.

The Chair: Very good.

You look pensive, Mr. Chong. Do you wish to weigh in?

Hon. Michael Chong: We'll support the subamendment.

(Subamendment agreed to)

(Amendment as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Let's move on to the next amendment, then.

Mr. Naqvi, would you like to repeat that for us, please?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you.

The next amendment was to remove clause (a) and clause (b).

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't support this amendment. Removing clause (a) would have the effect of not making these hearings a priority. I believe these hearings should be a priority. We've waited three long years to get these documents and to examine this matter, so I think it should be a priority.

Secondly, I don't support the amendment because I believe that we should be meeting twice a week. The House of Commons administration has indicated that there are the technical resources and human resources available to meet twice a week. That will allow us to examine this matter sufficiently before we adjourn at the end of June. If we only meet once a week, we're not going to have enough time to examine this matter.

I would like us to meet twice a week, which is what the motion proposes, as other parliamentary committees do, and I would like us to keep these hearings a priority of this committee. I don't support the amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Chong, just for clarity, our current meeting is three hours long on Monday evening. Are you proposing two three-hour meetings per week?

Hon. Michael Chong: No, Mr. Chair. I'm proposing two two-hour meetings a week. I think that would be better for members' schedules as well. We would meet from 6:30 to 8:30 on Monday evening and then again from 6:30 to 8:30 on Wednesday evening, allowing us, on Monday evening, to get home at a more reasonable hour.

That is what the motion is proposing, in not so great detail, Mr. Chair. It gives you flexibility to determine the exact times of the meetings, but that's what I would propose.

Just to finish, I don't support the amendment because it would have the effect of not making these hearings, this study, a priority, and it would have the effect of our only having a chance to meet once a week. As you know, the calendar over the coming weeks is full of constituency weeks.

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. Erskine-Smith, your hand is up.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

I don't really have an issue with this being a priority. That seems fair to me. It would also make sense that we accommodate the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to attend. I don't know that this needs to get in the way of that, but regardless, I have no real issue with (a) in terms of making it a priority.

I don't really see the need right now. It may be that the need arises later, and I appreciate what Michael is saying, but based on the text in front of us, the witnesses in front of us and the idea that it's at least two meetings, it's kind of incomprehensible that we'd be talking about jamming in two meetings a week at this moment.

I would think that we would start this study and come back to this if the three hours a week is insufficient. We could revisit it after a couple of three-hour meetings. I see no reason right now to jam all of our schedules unnecessarily.

The Chair: All right. Seeing no further interventions....

Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

While the study is important, we have to look at how long it has taken to get here. I don't want us to lose sight of the fact that there is still some work to wrap up. I'm thinking of the analysts. Our study on Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy is almost complete. We need to schedule an hour for the Taiwan representative to appear and an hour for Deputy Prime Minister Freeland.

In my opinion, it wouldn't be reasonable to drop these items, which are almost completed. We need to let the analysts do their jobs. I would like to give the chair the flexibility to tie everything up. I sat on the ad hoc committee, and I can understand the importance of the issue. I don't think that doing this new study one or two meetings later makes much of a difference. That way, we wouldn't leave any work unfinished and we could move right into preparing the report on the Winnipeg lab. There would be no interruptions. For that reason, I will vote in favour of the amendment.

• (0930)

[*English*]

The Chair: All right. Are there any further interventions?

We'd best take the roll on this one. We're voting to delete (a) and (b), to be clear.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'll make a last pitch to have two meetings a week.

We have, practically speaking, only six sitting weeks left for committees to meet. There are eight or so sitting weeks left, but the reality is that the last two weeks are not weeks where we can practically have meetings, because of the need to get estimates and other government legislative priorities through in the last two sitting weeks of June. What that practically means is that we have six sitting weeks in which a committee could meet. If we're only going to meet once a week, that leaves us with six meetings.

That's not a lot of meetings to complete the Indo-Pacific strategy; to hear from Minister Freeland, as she was previously scheduled to appear; and, on top of that, to hear from witnesses concerning the Winnipeg lab. I really think that going from one three-hour meeting a week to two two-hour meetings a week would allow us to complete all of the agreed-to studies in front of the committee before a summer adjournment.

The Chair: Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

I think there's a bit of a misunderstanding here. Earlier, we agreed to study the amendments one by one, but now we're studying two at the same time. There is a lack of coherence. I would like us to look at point (a) first and then point (b). That would keep things clear, as we agreed.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, I think that's probably reasonable, because they are two—

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

Can you tell us what amendment we're on, then?

The Chair: We are on the amendment to remove article (a): “make this study a priority over its other business,” etc.

Voting for this means that we would, as a committee, need to deliberately schedule it for when we thought we wanted it, which could be right away, so basically fulfilling the spirit of (a). If the committee agrees that this should take priority over the other business, then that's what we would do. If, on the other hand, the committee wanted it to take its turn in terms of the other work the committee is doing, then we would vote for the amendment.

Hon. Michael Chong: To clarify, I do not support this amendment. I believe the study should be a priority. We've waited three long years to get to this point, and it's time for us to expeditiously deal with this matter in committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: I won't call it a complicating factor, but one factor that needs to be considered is that there have been other committees meeting, including the special committee that Mr. Villemure and I believe Ms. McPherson were on. Part of the consideration is whether or not this has been examined enough so that, in total, the government is getting the kind of input it requires to make wise decisions, as we say, each day.

Let us then look at the motion—

● (0935)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, if I could—

The Chair: Yes, Ms. McPherson, go ahead.

Ms. Heather McPherson: On your last comment, I'd like to say that while René and I were on the ad hoc committee, the mandate of the ad hoc committee was not to look at improvements and recommendations for the government, so in fact that work has not been done.

I agree with Mr. Chong that we should prioritize this work. Our work was separate. I think we did some really excellent work together, but that was not what the mandate of that committee was.

The Chair: I appreciate that clarity. Thank you very much.

That makes clear what we are voting for or against. Let's look at the amendment to remove paragraph (a) with the understanding of what a yes or a no means on this particular amendment.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: We will now go on to the second amendment, which is to instruct the chair and the clerk to take the necessary steps to arrange for two meetings of the committee each sitting week. Mr. Chong has clarified this to be two two-hour meetings per week. The amendment suggested is to remove this particular part of the motion.

Again, is there anybody speaking to that?

Mr. Chong, go ahead.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The reality is that there are nine sitting weeks left. During the last two sitting weeks it will not be possible, practically speaking,

to have meetings, so that means eight weeks remain. Because of House votes, our track record on this committee has been that one out of three meetings has been cancelled. That means that within the eight sitting weeks, if we stick to potentially once a week on Monday evenings, likely we would have only five or maybe six slots for meetings. In my view, that's not sufficient time to deal with all the matters in front of the committee, including this study if the motion is adopted.

I think going to twice a week would ensure that we would have sufficient time to complete the business of the committee. It's only one extra hour a week—going from three to four hours a week. It's what every other committee on the Hill does—two two-hour meetings a week.

I encourage members to defeat this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Naqvi, go ahead.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Chair.

This amendment really makes sure to build on Mr. Chong's point that this issue is a priority and that we need to deal with this issue as quickly as possible. To stay with the regular schedule of this committee, which is a three-hour meeting per week, we have just all agreed that there will be at least two meetings to study this matter. That's six hours. We're of the view that this is sufficient time to go through all of the witnesses who are listed in the motion, and that will allow the committee members ample to time to appropriately review the depth and scope of this matter.

Given everyone's schedules, given the resources of the House of Commons and given the fairly generous schedule that this committee has of three hours per week of meetings, having four hours of meetings per week is unnecessary.

Again, it's coming from the spirit of ensuring that this matter is dealt with as quickly as possible and that there's as much transparency as possible. That's the stated purpose for which Mr. Chong brought this motion. This amendment makes sure that we continue with our regularly scheduled time, which fits in everybody's schedule for members of this committee, and deal with this matter over the next two meetings expeditiously.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Yip.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Given that (a) is still in the motion to make this study a priority over its other business, I don't think we need to have (b) because the motion is already prioritizing these meetings. We don't need to take on extra meetings. I think that having three hours at a time really gives us a chance to delve into a subject in terms of its time frame, with three hours straight of looking into the matter, whereas breaking it up into more meetings may lessen that intensity.

I just feel that (a) does address it. As Mr. Villemure has suggested, there are still other studies. We have to finish the Indo-Pacific strategy, as well as the Taiwan study.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

In the words of my colleague opposite, Mr. Naqvi, I agree that we have to do this expeditiously, but we still have to do it properly. Mr. Chong's proposal seems reasonable to me. There are so many things to look at, and saving time is the least of our worries given the need to restore the public's trust in government institutions. Having read the report in its final form, I think there is a major concern. It is completely pointless to waste time debating whether we should take an hour more or an hour less for this study given the current level of trust in this government. Therefore, I support Mr. Chong's position.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, I thought of something. I must say that I'm confused about the options.

Having sat on this committee since September, I must admit that it isn't always pleasant to attend meetings on Monday evenings from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., given our long working hours. However, I would like to pick up on what my colleague Ms. Yip said. Three-hour meetings give us the chance to establish a great dynamic and to meet with a number of witnesses and refer to them.

I also want to note that we're in the middle of a study. We have started and almost completed the Indo-Pacific study. I would like to remind my colleagues that, since the start of my parliamentary life, there have been votes in the House on Wednesdays. We often hold one or two votes, and sometimes as many as ten. As the member representing Orléans, I'm delighted to take part in these votes. However, this means that committee meetings scheduled for 3:30 p.m. or 4:30 p.m. on that day must often be postponed until 6:30 p.m.

Our committee already meets on Mondays. It's on the parliamentary calendar until June. We can look at this again in September, but it's on our agendas. There seems to be talk of adding a meeting on Wednesdays. I'm trying to understand Mr. Chong's goal. Is it to not have meetings on Wednesdays? We already know that votes are scheduled on Wednesdays in the House. As a result, committee meetings will be postponed and we'll hardly ever be able to meet. Instead, we should keep our Monday meetings, since we can hold them most of the time.

Mr. Chair, as part of our Indo-Pacific study, we have met with some outstanding witnesses over the past few weeks. I applaud this. It has been a real pleasure. We finally started this study and we were hoping to finish it. I'm not discounting the significance of Mr. Chong's motion. I agree that we need to look at this topic. However, in my opinion, a motion to deviate from the parliamen-

tary calendar is tantamount to saying that we don't want to complete any study.

• (0945)

[*English*]

The Chair: Before I recognize Mr. Smith, Mr. Villemure and Mr. Chong, who are wishing to speak, I should also mention that, at this point, it isn't guaranteed that we would have the House resources. Notwithstanding the fact that the original motion setting up this committee gave it priority over just about everything else—no over votes and other things, of course—we're not guaranteed that we'll actually be able to have those Wednesday meetings.

Again, next I have Mr. Smith, Mr. Villemure and Mr. Chong.

Mr. Smith, go ahead.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Thanks, Chair.

As I said earlier, I'd be interested in others' thoughts on this. At the end of the day, when I look at the list of witnesses in the motion, six hours will accomplish those witnesses and then some. If there is a long list of additional witnesses pursuant to the basket clause there, then so be it. Maybe you can correct me and say that you're expecting this to be 12 hours or 18 hours, but at the end of the day, it looks to me like two meetings, as currently scheduled, gets us through that list of witnesses.

As I said before, I don't really understand what the rationale is for expanding it further. I recognize the importance but not the urgency here. To my understanding, in terms of Michael's initial explanation of the importance of this motion, his point is taken: We are to question the reason for the delay, when there was a red flag in 2018 and the administrative investigation was initiated in 2019. That's worth looking at, for sure. That's important. It's not urgent, though. Then we are to address the delay in document disclosure. I was one of the Liberals to vote in the House for disclosure. I value transparency and getting to the bottom of that, but again, it is important but not urgent.

Why are we jamming our scheduled House resources...and for what? I don't see it at all. We do two three-hour meetings. Then we can have a conversation. If we need more, we add more.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We'll go to Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

I'm hearing my colleagues' comments, on the whole. It seems that we're reaching the point where we must decide whether it's important. It's indeed important.

We should remember that the Special Committee on the Canada-People's Republic of China Relationship has a broad mission. The motion doesn't include one item that we might want to add. The item is the impact of foreign interference, in this case, on diplomatic relations with China. The motion doesn't include this, but it could be added.

In addition, I can confirm that other witnesses will be added. I think that it would be unwise to narrow the scope of the study.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Chong, go ahead.

Hon. Michael Chong: I have a couple of points.

First, in drafting this motion, I canvassed a number of members of the committee, and it was clear that members did not want to sit during constituency weeks. I'm happy to sit during constituency weeks. I think there are lots of House resources available during constituency weeks, so my initial proposal was that we sit twice a week during constituency weeks to deal with this matter because the House calendar this spring is so full of constituency weeks. However, members weren't in favour of that, so I took that into consideration in the drafting of the motion so that we would sit as a committee only during sitting weeks.

The second factor in all of this, Mr. Chair, is that if this motion is adopted, we will be calling nine witnesses to appear. Two of them are ministers. Ministers are normally accorded a full meeting. They normally appear alone as a witness. They don't appear with the witnesses enumerated in (i) through (vii) in the motion. That means two meetings would already be gone from the meetings we need.

In addition, we have seven departmental witnesses. That will take at least three, if not four, meetings. What we need for this study, Mr. Chair, is not two meetings; it's five meetings. That is in accordance with the amendment that was just adopted of "at least two meetings", but two meetings is not going to be sufficient to hear from all the witnesses.

Just to get through the departmental security officer, the deputy minister of health, the vice-president of PHAC, the second vice-president of PHAC, the president of PHAC, the director of CSIS and the national security and intelligence adviser is going to take at least three meetings, because you're not going to have a panel of four or five witnesses in front of this committee on such an important matter. We need to hear from panels of one or two witnesses, so that means it's going to take at least three meetings to get through these seven witnesses from PHAC, PCO and CSIS. There will be probably two panels for PHAC, one panel for the director of CSIS and one panel for the national security and intelligence adviser.

Right there we're going to need four meetings. In addition to that, we have the two ministers who are being asked to appear. We're looking at five meetings, and if we stick to once a week, we're not going to be able to dispose of the business of the committee before we adjourn for the summer. That's why I think we should stick with meeting twice a week. Doing that would allow us to get through this study, to hear from witnesses and to also dispose of other matters in front of the committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (0950)

The Chair: I would point out that, generally speaking, when we invite a minister to appear on a panel, the minister is normally around for one hour. It's usually not more than that. They usually bring officials. I'm just speaking in general terms.

Hon. Michael Chong: Normally ministers, when they're asked to appear, appear for a two-hour slot. A one-and-a-half to two-hour slot is dedicated. Normally the minister appears for the first hour. They do not appear alone. They appear with their support—

The Chair: That's what I was in the process of saying, Mr. Chong. Allow me to conclude.

A rule that we loosely follow is that we try to have no more than three people on a panel, because each has their five minutes, and that gives time for a couple of rounds. With the three-hour time slot, we will sometimes have an hour and a half per panel, which, in our experience, has provided more than sufficient time to question the three people on the panel. Your proposal to have five meetings to go through this might be a trifle generous in terms of our use of time, but I'll leave that up to the members to decide.

Mr. Naqvi, go ahead.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I just want to echo the point you're making, Chair. Again, I will reinforce the point that six hours at the outset, with the committee agreeing to at least two meetings, is sufficient time to go through all those witnesses.

I would just caution the members again on what I said earlier in my opening remarks. My fear is that this is all political posturing. This is all for a political show as opposed to being transparent and being coherent in providing findings for Canadians. This reminds me a lot of another committee that I've been a member of for over two years now, the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency, dealing with the invocation of the Emergencies Act. It's ongoing. The world has moved on. We've had one public inquiry done within a year's time, but that committee is still not finished its work because so much time has been taken by political posturing. That does not serve Canadians. That does not serve this Parliament. That is not befitting of our job as members of Parliament.

I really urge the members. I think we have a really cogent plan here—two meetings, a regular schedule, three hours each—that will accommodate the ministers and accommodate the witnesses that Mr. Chong has presented so that we can be focused, we can be transparent, we can ask the relevant questions in the spirit of accountability and we can produce a report that will be of benefit to Canadians.

Thank you.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Monsieur Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

With all due respect to my colleague across the way, I find it a bit odd that he should refer to political posturing. The government party went after its own Speaker to cover up the facts and took disproportionate action to keep things quiet. Under the circumstances, I think that political posturing is an inappropriate reference.

My colleague pointed out the need for efficiency and transparency. No matter the schedule, this should be the case. This mandate is serious and must be treated as such. I think that we shouldn't avoid trying to get to the bottom of things. This important issue has shaken the confidence of Canadians. I want the people who keep up with our work to know that we take it seriously and that we aren't avoiding meetings or avoiding getting to the bottom of things. In terms of political posturing, care should be taken when using this term. There has been quite a bit of it on the other side.

[*English*]

The Chair: With that, I think we will take the vote on removing item (b).

The amendment proposed is to remove item (b), which essentially, if I try to interpret what's been said, would keep us to our regular schedule of one meeting per week of three hours.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: What's next? The amendment goes down to section (d) and would remove the notion of the summons pursuant to Standing Order 108(1), considering that this always remains an option in any event.

Mr. Chong, did you wish to speak to this?

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes. I think we should leave the summons in the motion. I do not support the amendment, and here's why. The actors involved in this national security breach of the Winnipeg lab do not deserve the benefit of the doubt. When we examined this matter in the last Parliament, we did so in good faith as a committee. At every step along the way, the individuals involved in this matter obstructed, obfuscated and delayed the release of these documents we finally got.

Initially, they told us that we could not get the documents because of privacy concerns, which was not true. The Privacy Act exempts judicial proceedings and other proceedings, such as parliamentary committees, from the provisions of the Privacy Act. When that argument didn't work, they then resorted to hiding behind "national security", which we now know was not a legitimate reason for withholding the documents. They then defied four orders of the House of Commons—including a summons to the bar—for these documents.

I don't support removing the summons from the motion. The motion is worded in a way—I drafted it in a way—that doesn't compel you to use the summons, but it gives you the option to use it if necessary. We need to hear from these witnesses. I don't want to waste more time than this meeting in having another meeting where you are telling us that departmental officials who have been requested to appear have refused to appear. I don't want to have another discussion about that. I'd like us to adopt this portion of the motion as is, so that if a witness says to you that they're not available, then

you can actually issue them a summons so that they will appear. It's high time that we get answers on these matters.

I don't support the amendment.

• (1000)

The Chair: I'm looking for a bit of clarity here, Mr. Chong, because I take your point. If we invite them and they're unavailable, we would, under normal circumstances, follow up with a summons. Are you suggesting—I don't want to put words in your mouth here—that we go with the summons right off the top?

Hon. Michael Chong: No. I'm saying that you invite them to appear, as chairs normally invite witnesses to appear, and you extend them the courtesy of being flexible about when they might appear, as chairs normally extend that courtesy, but if a witness refuses to appear, then you have the threat of telling them that you are empowered to summons them. I hope that you would not have to use that threat, but if you do need to use it, the motion empowers you to do it.

You begin with the invitation, but if witnesses refuse to appear, you are empowered as chair, if this motion is adopted, to summons them.

The Chair: That's essentially formalizing what we would do anyway.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, but without wasting any further time on this matter, because I think we've wasted a lot of time—

The Chair: Okay. Fair enough.

Hon. Michael Chong: —on procedure to get to this point.

The Chair: Mr. Naqvi.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I think Mr. Chong just admitted the fact that this part is redundant, because that power already exists. You don't need to state that in the motion. I remember in the past debating with members on whether or not we should have a line about taking oaths before they appear before the committee. This is not the United States of America. There are certain conventions and certain rules that are already in place in our parliamentary procedure. The power to summons if a witness refuses to appear lies with the chair and is within the Standing Orders. You do need not to state that in the motion.

I think the functions of this committee, like all committees, will continue to function appropriately with or without this in the motion. With this particular clause, I think it's quite redundant, and we should not have it in the motion.

The Chair: Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

Yes, the current rules provide for this. However, I gather that Mr. Chong would rather that the motion call on the chair to act in all cases, rather than having to negotiate on a case-by-case basis. If a number of witnesses don't want to appear and we must vote on the summons each time, it isn't productive. I think that we can save time here.

Including this in the wording of the motion will also affect some witnesses, who may think twice before declining to appear. I'll support Mr. Chong's view on this. It seems reasonable. I completely agree that the opposite argument wouldn't take anything away from the motion, since it's in the Standing Orders. However, we shouldn't need to reopen the debate for every refusal.

[*English*]

The Chair: As chair, I'm looking at the practical application of this. Let's look at the scenario. If we make an invitation and the response we get is inconclusive and they're not sure whether or not they're available, I guess I would look for a bit of advice from the committee as to what would then trigger the summons—which, as Mr. Naqvi pointed out, exists anyway. Help paint the picture for me as to when I would actually take that step.

Mr. Villemure is first and then Mr. Chong.

[*Translation*]

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

I wouldn't want to usurp your power in any way, but here's how I see things. The witnesses are invited to appear. For their own reasons, some refuse to do so. At that point, the committee will certainly consider the circumstances. For example, if we invite a woman who is due to give birth, she won't be able to appear.

However, I wouldn't want to hold a discussion with a vote every time. We would leave it up to you to decide whether to send the summons, taking into account the circumstances and the fact that we obviously want the person to appear. This isn't a rehash of the Standing Orders. We're announcing this in advance while giving you some leeway and hoping that the witnesses appear.

• (1005)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Chong, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Michael Chong: I agree with my honourable colleague. An official may claim to be unavailable to appear before the committee, or provide some other excuse. In these types of cases, under this motion, you will have the power to require the witness to appear before the committee.

[*English*]

I agree with my colleague. In your time as chair, Mr. Chair, there have been witnesses who have indicated that they were not available to appear or that they didn't want to appear. This empowers you to use the power that you have, when so authorized by the committee, to issue a summons for a witness.

If we don't adopt this summons in the motion, if we don't adopt this language in the motion, we are going to have to have another meeting to move a motion to empower you to summons a witness.

As you said at the outset of this meeting, we're here discussing the procedure and the mechanics of how this study will unfold. This gives you the option of issuing a summons so that we don't have to go through this process again at some future date because the witness has decided they don't want to appear.

Often departmental officials will say that the DSO is not going to appear but the president of PHAC is going to appear in their place. We don't want that. We have enumerated a list of seven departmental witnesses whom we would like to hear from. We want to hear from each and every one of those witnesses, and we don't want to hear from another witness in lieu of one of those witnesses, so this motion makes it clear that you are empowered to invite those witnesses. If they don't want to appear, you are empowered by the committee to issue a summons.

The Chair: Thank you. I appreciate the clarity.

Mr. Berthold, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, the impact of this motion will be twofold. First, it gives you the permission and authority to act at this time. Second, it's time for the witnesses to understand that the committee business is serious. The witnesses will know that, if they don't accept your kind invitation, they will be summoned to appear before us.

In another situation, the House now has before it a question of privilege to call a witness to the stand, because that witness refused to answer the parliamentarians' questions. Parliamentary committees are serious business. I think that, by passing this motion, we'll be sending two messages to the witnesses. We want to hear from you, and we will be hearing from you. That's what matters.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Naqvi.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thanks, Chair.

I don't want to belabour the point. I think it's just a bad precedent from a parliamentary procedure perspective to have something like this in a motion when something exists in the Standing Orders. There are bad optics in telling potential witnesses that if they don't show up they'll get an arrest warrant against them. I mean, it's just not how we function in our system, in our Parliament.

I'm looking beyond this particular study. I just don't like the precedent, just as I stated about the precedent of requiring the witnesses to take an oath. I mean, that's not the message we send when they're appearing before a parliamentary committee.

In any case, I just wanted to get that off my chest. I've made my point. I suggest that in the interest of time—it's taken up almost 90 minutes now—with only two votes left, if we could take the two votes together, we could move on with our day and start preparing for the study.

Thank you.

• (1010)

The Chair: Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: I agree with my colleague that this motion would set a precedent. I'm not a regular member of this committee. However, I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics for a long time. We're noticing a trend. Some witnesses don't want to appear before a committee, or don't say anything when they come. This wasn't the case before. We didn't need to resort to this. That said, it seems to have become necessary today. It's sad, but if we must set a precedent, let's do so. The situation has changed and the circumstances are different.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have seen, just as a participant in other committees and occasionally sitting in, that there is a sentiment out there, just to sensitize you all to this, that sometimes the treatment of witnesses at committees has probably created misgivings about attending. We'll take the vote on this one, but I would suggest that we deposit right now the notion that, whatever form these hearings take, they do be respectful. That is critical, I think.

The last word is with you, Mr. Villemure. Then we'll take the vote.

[*Translation*]

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

I completely agree with you. In some committees, witnesses have been treated like defendants. That isn't right either. We all agree that both sides may have shown a lack of respect. In our work, we still need a certain level of decorum to ensure that the committee operates in a way that respects individuals. To that end, I remain in agreement with Mr. Chong.

[*English*]

The Chair: I don't see any other hands up. Let's take the roll vote on this one.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: The next amendment is to remove the departmental security officer, executive director of security, Public Health Agency of Canada, as a witness.

Mr. Naqvi, I understand that your amendment would be to remove this person as one of the individuals identified as a witness.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Chair, we'll withdraw that amendment and the amendment dealing with the deputy clerk of the Privy Council and national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister.

The only one left to vote on, I would suggest, is (e)(iii): "other witnesses whose names shall be provided by the parties to the clerk of the committee within one week of the adoption of this motion". I would take that one out.

The Chair: Are you taking out the last two amendments, then?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: It's the first two.

The Chair: All right. Those are gone.

Now we're down to section (e)(iii). You're proposing an amendment to remove "other witnesses whose names shall be provided by the parties to the clerk of the committee within one week of the adoption of this motion". Do you wish to speak to that?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Absolutely. Again, I will say what I said earlier. This is to provide some definition and scope to this study. The list of witnesses is exhaustive. We're agreeing to that list. We've agreed now to have at least two meetings. We will be meeting twice a week as per what has been adopted in the committee.

I think this list allows us to get to the bottom of the issues that we all want to discuss. There is no need to have this catch-all provision with our witnesses. When the end of the questioning is done, if we feel that more witnesses are needed, then more witnesses can be added at that time, but by Mr. Chong's own admission, it will require about five meetings to go through all these witnesses, which I think is ample time. Then, at that time, we will assess as a committee whether we need more witnesses or not.

• (1015)

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Chong and then Mr. Villemure.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't support the amendment. I think this clause in the motion gives you, Mr. Chair, the flexibility to invite other witnesses as may be necessary. I know that other members on the committee have ideas for additional witnesses who are not captured by the motion. This clause would allow you to entertain the invitation of those other witnesses.

Finally, in hearing from the seven witnesses and two ministers, during the course of those nine different witnesses and ministers appearing, we may hear testimony that may reveal other individuals the committee has to hear from, so I think we should keep this clause in the motion. That's why I don't support the amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: I have Ms. McPherson and then Mr. Villemure.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also, like Mr. Chong, don't support this amendment. I don't understand why we would want to limit the ability for other members to bring forward names. This was a well-drafted list of witnesses from Mr. Chong, but all members of the committee should have the opportunity to submit names, to submit suggestions to the clerk for this study, and I don't understand why any member would want to limit our ability to do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

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

I think that I speak for all opposition members in saying that I don't see the need to limit the number of witnesses at this point. Personally, I would like to invite certain witnesses whose names aren't on the list. I won't be supporting this amendment.

[English]

The Chair: This then raises an issue that wouldn't ordinarily come up at the beginning of any study: Notwithstanding the list that Mr. Chong has included in his motion, should we then entertain submissions from members as to other people they would want to invite?

Again, we have to go back to the point that Mr. Chong made very clearly. Even with two meetings a week, really, in adding an extra hour of witness testimony, we're looking at the prospect of having this particular subject, which is litigating things that have happened in the past, consume a lot of the capacity we would have to look at things like the Indo-Pacific strategy, like Taiwan, like others, which have ramifications going forward, especially in terms of government policy.

As chair I would just issue a caution that we manage our expectations as to what we hope to accomplish here, versus what we've already taken on in terms of the work that the committee has decided it wants to do.

Mr. Villemure.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Mr. Chair, thank you for that wisdom. In my experience on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, when we start too many things at once, we don't finish anything. I agree with you there.

However, in keeping with this committee's mission, we need to discuss diplomacy and the People's Republic of China's actions to destabilize Canada. I think that we need an opinion outside the public health field. From a diplomatic perspective, the committee must address this aspect of its mission. That's why I don't want to limit the number of witnesses, even though I understand that we shouldn't invite 14. If we limit the number of witnesses, we won't meet with any. Yet there are ways of meeting with a few more.

• (1020)

[English]

The Chair: Mrs. Lalonde, go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I'm just trying to rationalize all of this, because what we are proposing is that we would be removing the (iii). Then Mr. Chong said that we could add them later. I think this is always something that can be done, but the point he is making does also have a counter-effect, because we're also saying "within one week of the adoption of this motion", so unless....

I read it in French and I'm reading it in English. I'm just trying to understand what Mr. Chong is saying about how well crafted this motion is. He is actually saying the opposite, because if we're going to be adding more witnesses later, through (iii) he is limiting that to seven days. As I said, I know I'm French and I'm trying to understand. I'm saying this in English because it makes no sense with respect to what my hon. colleague is saying, that down the road we'll

be able to add witnesses, when he has actually, in his well-crafted motion, put seven days from the date this is adopted.

I'm very sorry, Mr. Chair, but I'm very confused here this morning.

The Chair: The chair does note that it is pretty common practice in committees to set a timeline for the identification of witnesses. I kind of interpret this as doing that, but we'll go to Mr. Chong and then back to you, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I just want to—

The Chair: All right. Yes. Please go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I'm sorry. I apologize.

My point is that throughout the motion we are limiting it to within seven days of this motion. I agree with you, Mr. Chair, but this motion is saying.... Mr. Chong just said that as we go along we can add names. I don't want to paraphrase or quote him, but that's my understanding of what he said. This motion, as you said, would limit us to seven days, which I know you appreciate.

The reason we're amending this is that you cannot add more names throughout the study, Mr. Chong.

The Chair: Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think Madame Lalonde has raised a good point. If this amendment that's in front of us is defeated, then I'll move an amendment to strike "within one week of the adoption of this motion".

I'm going to wait until we dispose of the amendment in front of the committee right now.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mrs. Lalonde, please, if you want to put something in, then turn on your mic, and we'll do that.

Again, I don't want to aim the discussion in a particular direction, but I would suggest that if we remove the "one week", then that will leave things wide open indefinitely.

There again, the committee is the master of its own course of action and certainly in the interest of doing a thorough job, it will be up to the committee to really monitor how things progress. If, for instance, the other things that have already been approved on our docket seem to be important to the committee, and we know we have a limited horizon in terms of the amount of work that we can potentially get done, it will take a smackerel of self-discipline here collectively to make sure that the important things get done. I will just leave that with you.

Let's deal with the amendment first. Then, if Mr. Chong wants an amendment, we'll consider that after. Is that all right?

Let's deal with this amendment first. The amendment is basically to remove subsection (iii) under section (e).

(Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: We don't need the suspense. I think the amendment has been defeated.

Mr. Chong, go ahead.

• (1025)

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, I move, based on the correct analysis by Madame Lalonde, that we strike from clause (e)(iii) the words “within one week of the adoption of this motion”. That amendment will allow members a bit more time to submit witnesses if we hear testimony that may lead us to other witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Is there any comment on this?

Do you need a minute?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Can Mr. Chong repeat the change again?

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, I move that in clause (e)(iii), we strike the following words: “within one week of the adoption of this motion”.

The Chair: Is there any further comment?

We're all on the same page, then. I see thumbs up on the screen. We're all good. I think we have what we need.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: We now need to go to the main motion as amended, because we accepted the first amendment of “at least two meetings”. We've all agreed that this one is okay as well.

At the start, the lead-in is the study “of at least two meetings”, and at the end we have removed “within one week of the adoption of this motion”. Those are the two amendments that we have agreed to.

We should now vote on the main motion. Are we ready to do that? How do you want to do it? Do you want the roll call, or do you want to just do thumbs up and thumbs down?

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: It will be unanimous, so why don't we just do thumbs up?

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

The Chair: The chair very much appreciates the clarity and collegiality here as we work through the mechanics. This will be a fascinating study, to be sure.

Is there any other business?

I would suggest.... This goes back to something that I've mentioned a couple of times. We have had the notion of committee travel with regard to the Indo-Pacific strategy. The opportunity to speak to some of the nations that would be, hopefully, positively affected by Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy would be instructive, particularly as we action the elements of the Indo-Pacific strategy. I want to leave that with you because at some point we need to really tackle that and get deliberate as to what we intend to do in that regard.

Mr. Chong, do you want to add something? Okay, you're good.

Is there anything else? No.

We are adjourned. Thank you.

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