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Chair: Mr. John Brassard



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• (1715)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC)): I will call the meeting to order.

We've moved into a public session now of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. We're dealing with a motion that was presented by Mr. Barrett at our last meeting, in camera.

I will remind every member of the committee that there were discussions that went on in camera last time and to be mindful in your comments not to speak about what we discussed in camera.

I'm going to move to Mr. Barrett on the motion.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thanks very much, Chair. I'm just checking to see that all of the members are back online.

It's incredibly important that we're able to provide transparency for Canadians with respect to the protection of their personal information. Questions have been raised about the ArriveCAN application.

Though there is another parliamentary committee that is reviewing different aspects of the app, I think it's incredibly important that this committee look at the impacts on the personal privacy of Canadians. For example, we know now that some contractors who worked on the app—though we don't know how many or who those contractors were—did not have to have the requisite security clearance in place before the work began. Where secret or top-secret clearance may have been required, that requirement was waived.

I think we know that an application in process for your passport doesn't get you on the plane, and a security clearance application in process should not give you access to the IT systems for the Government of Canada, particularly the ones that handle the biometric and personal information of millions of Canadians. That app was downloaded more than eight million times by eight million individual users, and those users could have then uploaded multiple profiles for members of their family or travelling party. It's incredibly important that we're able to provide those assurances.

This motion is measured, in terms of the number of meetings not being excessive, but it's also not prescriptive, and allows for all the parties around the table to put forward witnesses they think would be important.

Should we find adequate responses and be satisfied with responses from government officials and third parties, then the committee

can move on to other things. However, the matter is pressing. It's time-sensitive. I think we should move on with this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

We have a motion on the floor, moved by Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Fergus, did I see your hand?

[Translation]

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

I'd like to thank Mr. Barrett for moving this motion.

I know this is an important issue. Perhaps that's why my dear colleague Mr. Barrett had proposed that this motion be studied in the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. It's almost the same motion.

• (1720)

[English]

Mr. Chair, I have to admit that I'm beginning to wonder if this is an effective use of our committee's time.

Earlier today, I caught a little bit of OGGO's testimony. I caught a number of questions by my good friend, Mr. Barrett. Those questions were almost uniquely, if not entirely, on the questions of privacy and the privacy of Canadians, questions that I think we would ask here at this committee. It is not.... It's more than not a normal tradition of this House. As a matter of fact, it's an expressed rule of this House that you don't have two committees studying the exact same thing because that's not an effective use of committee members.

In spite of that, we have different mandates—OGGO and our committee here on ethics and privacy. I could understand that you might want to make the argument that there could be a gap in between what is being discussed at OGGO and what would be discussed here. I would then say that we figure out if there is that gap. Let OGGO continue to do its work, and let us figure out if there is a different angle that we should take or that we would take or if there are gaps in the testimony and questions that weren't asked or weren't answered. However, until we see the work that's being done by OGGO, I'm not certain that there is that timeliness for us to duplicate the work of another committee.

When I take a look at the notice of meeting from earlier today—because I only caught a part of it; I didn't catch all of it—I see that OGGO had the Canada Border Services Agency, the Department of Public Works and Government Services, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Public Safety Canada, and Shared Services Canada. At the previous meeting two weeks ago, Mr. Chair, GC Strategies was there, and there was the Customs and Immigration Union. I'm scratching my head as to who else we would invite to come speak to us about the ArriveCAN app.

All this is to say that I'm not against the idea of exploring this issue if there is an actual gap, but I think it's quite premature for us to do that. It would be a waste of our time. We have other issues to talk about—access to information. Let's wait until OGGO has issued its report. Let's take a look at that report. We could have the analysts prepare us some places, suggest some areas, if there are any, where we would take an interest at this committee.

For that reason, Mr. Chair, I wouldn't be in favour of dropping all committee business to get this done right away when it's being done elsewhere by our colleagues, some of whom are present on this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Next I have Mr. Bains, followed by Ms. Khalid.

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I echo my colleague's comments. He summarized it quite well. I just want to add—I won't repeat everything—that the OGGO committee.... Mr. Barrett asked, again, all of these questions in that committee today and has further opportunity to continue to ask that line of questioning in that committee as we move forward.

Again, the missing pieces that we didn't receive today were some invoices to all of the relative parties that were associated with the development of the app; those we have yet to receive. We still have some information coming in. Mr. Barrett has more opportunity to continue the line of questioning, and the OGGO committee fully agreed to have full transparency. There's a big opportunity in that committee to get the information that Mr. Barrett is looking for, so I don't see why we need to duplicate it—as my colleague, Mr. Fergus, mentioned—in this committee here.

Again, I don't want to summarize everything that Mr. Fergus has mentioned already, but there is some more information coming in. We should wait for that information to come to light. Mr. Barrett will have the opportunity to ask those question again there. A report will be produced, and after that, we can proceed again if necessary.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bains.

We have roughly five minutes left. We have committee business at the end here. That's just a reminder to members of the committee.

Ms. Khalid, you're next.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

Just taking into account what members have said and based on discussions that I've had with members on this specific motion—I know I've had these conversations with all opposition members—I propose that we start this study.... Mr. Bains also pointed out that at OGGO, it was a unanimous motion voted on by all parties to have this study. I would propose to members that we go ahead and start what Mr. Barrett is proposing after we receive all of the testimony and evidence at OGGO. That will allow us to fill in the gaps, which I think is the ultimate purpose of what Mr. Barrett is trying to achieve with that privacy angle here at ethics.

Chair, with your approval, I would move an amendment to this motion: In the third line, where it starts with “That this study begin”, delete the word “immediately” and replace it with “upon completion of all witness testimony and submissions from the study at OGGO”, and then continue with “and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.”

It would read, “That this study begin upon completion of all witness testimony and submissions from the study at OGGO”.

This is similar to what we're proposing to study here.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

We have an amendment on the floor. The amendment is in order.

Do we have any discussion on the amendment?

Monsieur Villemure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): I call for a vote on the amendment.

The Chair: You are calling for a vote on the amendment, Mr. Villemure, but we can't go ahead with it.

[*English*]

There's still debate on the motion.

Mr. Barrett, I saw your hand next.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'm prepared to move to a vote.

The Chair: Not seeing any further debate on the amendment, I will call the vote.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you for that, Ms. Khalid.

We're now back on the main motion. Is there debate?

Ms. Khalid, go ahead.

• (1730)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks, Chair.

Again, I'm disappointed that we're duplicating the work and using resources in two committees for the exact same objective. I wish that members had agreed to delay this study until all the witness testimony at government operations has been received.

Chair, at this time I would like to move another amendment.

Again, this is based on conversations I've had with members of the opposition with respect to the number of meetings that have been suggested in this motion. I move that we delete the words "minimum of three" and replace that with "maximum of two".

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

The amendment is in order. It would delete "minimum of three" and replace it with "maximum of two". Is that correct?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes.

The Chair: Keeping in mind the time that we're at, is there any discussion on the amendment?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, I'll just quickly provide my rationale for it.

As my colleague Mr. Fergus has pointed out, lots of witnesses have been heard from at the government operations and estimates committee. It would be, again, quite redundant to reinstate them here. I think by limiting the maximum number of meetings on this we will be operating in a more efficient manner to really focus in on the issue of filling in the gaps with respect to privacy, which Mr. Barrett is trying to achieve at the government operations and estimates committee.

Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: I appreciate the intervention, Ms. Khalid.

Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Very quickly, Mr. Chair, I just want to make sure that my colleagues also understand that this isn't an attempt to drag the puck or to not have this discussion. If anyone took a look at my colleague Mr. Housefather's questioning today, they'd see that it was very assertive on this issue, trying to get to the bottom of the same issue that Mr. Barrett is trying to.

Again, I hope that members will try to limit our time on this to really focus in on the gaps, if there are any.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

On the amendment, is there any further discussion on "maximum of two"?

Seeing no further discussion, I will call a vote.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The amendment fails. We're now back on the main motion.

Is there any further discussion on the main motion proposed by Mr. Barrett?

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

The Chair: The motion passes.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. René Villemure: Mr. Chair, I'd like to give a notice of motion. While I'm reading it, the clerk can distribute the following text: That the Committee undertake, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), a study of foreign interference, particularly in the 2021 federal election, through the use of funds from foreign-influenced organizations affiliated with the United Front of the Communist Party of China, and the threats to the integrity of democratic institutions, intellectual property, and the Canadian state itself that arise from this foreign interference. And finally, that the committee report to the House.

• (1735)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

[*English*]

It's on notice.

It is in order. I thank you for that.

[*Translation*]

Would you like to add anything, Mr. Villemure?

Mr. René Villemure: Yes, I'd like to ask a question.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. René Villemure: As per the motion of October 24, the RCMP was supposed to send us the documents and lease agreements related to Roxham Road today, but we haven't received anything yet.

Is that right, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): I received a document that didn't come from the government. It was in French only and is therefore being translated.

Mr. René Villemure: Okay. We asked for a lot of things. I can't believe it's just one document, but in any event, how are we going to handle this?

[*English*]

The Chair: The expectation is that the documents.... The documents that were requested haven't been received at this point, with the exception of that one document you referred to.

The Clerk: Unless I received it during the meeting.... I was not checking; I was listening.

The Chair: Right. The expectation was that we were going to receive those documents by the end of today. We're waiting for those documents, so we will see, Monsieur Villemure. If the documents aren't received, we'll have to deal with that as a committee as well.

That concludes the meeting. I'm going to adjourn it now.

Thank you, everyone.

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