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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley



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• (1545)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): We're back in session. We have several motions to look at.

Just very briefly, I want to inform everyone that we had hoped to have the PBO here on Tuesday. Unfortunately, INDU beat us to the invite. It's at exactly the same time, 3:30 on Tuesday. I suspect, due to the short time period and also because of the Speaker vote on Tuesday, we are not going to get the PBO. We may not have a meeting anyway because of the Speaker vote and delays, and we may not have time for subsequent witnesses, so I'm guessing—and it's only a guess right now—that there's probably a 75% chance we may not have a Tuesday meeting. I'll let everyone know as soon as I know or as soon as we know, but that's just an FYI for planning.

It's Mrs. Kusie and then Mrs. Vignola.

Go ahead, Mrs. Kusie, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

This is a very grave motion that I bring forward to the committee here today, Mr. Chair and committee members, because we all know what happened, but it happened, and we have a choice now. We have a choice to move forward. We can do that. We can choose that today. We can choose to move forward. We can choose to begin the healing of the pain that was caused in the House of Commons last Friday. That healing begins with finding out what happened. How in God's name did this occur?

We in the House are not the only ones left wondering how this happened. Our Jewish brothers and sisters are reeling as to the mere possibility of this event having taken place.

I have here a letter from the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center, which states:

The fact that a veteran who served in a Nazi military unit was invited to and given a standing ovation in Parliament is shocking. At a time of rising antisemitism and Holocaust distortion, it is incredibly disturbing to see Canada's Parliament rise to applaud an individual who was a member of a unit in the Waffen-SS, a Nazi military branch responsible for the murder of Jews and others and that was declared a criminal organization during the Nuremberg Trials. There should be no confusion that this unit was responsible for the mass murder of innocent civilians with a level of brutality and malice that is unimaginable.

An apology is owed to every Holocaust survivor and veteran of the Second World War who fought the Nazis,—

I want committee members to listen to this part:

—and an explanation must be provided as to how this individual entered the hallowed halls of Canadian Parliament and received recognition from the Speaker of the House and a standing ovation.

Our Jewish brothers and sisters are reeling at even the possibility of this happening. Those who fought alongside us are wondering if their sacrifices were for naught and their alliances were for naught. The world is wondering how this happened. In the words of my leader, Pierre Poilievre, Canada will have to wear this forever, but we have an opportunity here today and we have an obligation.

Mr. Chair, this horrible thing has happened, and we can't change what happened. We can't change it even if we want to change it, but we have an opportunity and an obligation for this, by God, to never, ever happen again. I encourage every single member of this committee to consider what it means to deny the opportunity to Canadians, to Holocaust survivors, and to the world to find out what happened.

I don't want to hear excuses. I don't want to hear that the Speaker should be on the list, because—guess what—we can add the Speaker to the list. We can amend the list of agencies I put forward to add the Speaker to the list. I have no problem at all. I would actually be very interested in hearing from the former Speaker as to what vetting processes he and his staff went through for this tragedy to occur.

I'm hearing excuses such as that it should go through the procedure and House affairs committee. The House procedure committee is currently seized with foreign interference as a result of the House of Commons asking to look into it. It is seized with that right now. The government operations committee has the flexibility and the ability to be nimble, to look at any issue when it is pressing and to immediately turn our resources, energies and efforts to do that, and we should do so in this case, which has brought embarrassment not only to Canada but throughout the entire world, so I don't want to hear excuses. I am asking everyone here today. We have an opportunity to begin to move forward to start the healing, and we can make that choice. Every single one of us on this committee can make this choice today to start that healing process, Mr. Chair.

With that, I'd like to read my motion into the record:

Given the international embarrassment created by the Liberal Government by allowing a former soldier of a Nazi military unit in World War II to attend and be recognized during the President of Ukraine's special address to Parliament on Friday, September 22, and that proper vetting was either not done or this individual's military record was ignored, the committee dedicate 6 meetings holding hearings to look into this matter, and the committee hear witness testimony from representatives of the following: Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (Diplomatic Protocol); Royal Canadian Mounted Police; Canadian Security Intelligence Service; Parliamentary Protective Service; House of Commons (Sergeant at Arms); House of Commons (International and Interparliamentary Affairs); Privy Council Office; Prime Minister's Office.

Mr. Chair, I will leave my motion there. The world is watching. We have the opportunity today, every single one of us on this committee, to make the choice to start the healing process and to find out exactly, precisely, what happened so that it never, ever happens again.

Thank you.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Kusie.

I'll start the list. I have Mrs. Vignola and then Mr. Genuis.

Mrs. Vignola, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limouilou, BQ): I'll speak again later.

What happened on Friday was outrageous, indeed. We should never have been asked to stand in the House in the situation we found ourselves in. It's important to get to the bottom of what happened, to find out exactly how this person was able to enter the House of Commons, and to determine how we can prevent this kind of situation in the future. I think this is important. If we had known that he was a Nazi, or a former Nazi, regardless of whether or not he still pledged allegiance to that movement, no one in the House would have stood up. This person would not normally have been in the House of Commons, let alone occupying a seat of honour.

That said, despite my colleague's comments, I am of the opinion that it is the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs that must validate House procedures, and I don't mean that as an excuse. I think it makes sense that it's up to that committee to check its own functions and its own ways of doing things.

I'm not sure what availability we're talking about when we say that the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates is available to study this file. We have seven or eight studies in progress that we have yet to complete, some of them very lengthy. It would be another case of postponing very important studies.

We'll be able to talk about it, but I suggest postponing the debate or asking the chair to write a letter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs so that it can begin the study proposed in this motion. There's no way I'm going to say no and dismiss this motion out of hand. I think it's important that this situation be studied, but it must be done by the right committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm not sure if it's the translation. The clerk is asking if you are moving a motion to adjourn debate on this motion. Okay.

I understood what Mrs. Vignola said. The clerk looked over to me to ask if we were adjourning. I asked to clarify because of the translation, and so I'm asking if it was a motion to adjourn this debate.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I was looking at the translation as well. I think what the member said was that we should send a letter to PROC, which would be a different substantive motion. Again, if a member has the floor, they have the right to move a motion to adjourn debate. But if the member says that we should send a letter and then cedes the floor, I would very much like to speak to this motion.

Someone can get on the list after me and move adjournment of the debate, but I do think we should have an opportunity to have discussion of this. In any event, I don't think the member moved the motion while she had the floor. She said we should send a letter, which is a different matter.

That's on a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Vignola, and then I will discuss this.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'll repeat what I said. I moved that we adjourn the debate to consider asking the chair to write a letter to refer the motion to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

I have therefore moved to adjourn the debate first and foremost. I move a motion to add the debate.

• (1555)

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just on the point of order, Mr. Chair, the member had to say it while she had the floor, and I don't think she has the floor anymore.

The Chair: I understand the intent. Normally, we would just vote on the intent because of the way the committee has operated. Putting a condition on it brings it up for debate.

Why don't we hear from Mr. Genuis, and then we can go back to Mrs. Vignola and she can clarify what she wants.

Mr. Johns, did you want to chime in as well after Mr. Genuis?

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): You're the chair.

The Chair: I'm asking you.

Mr. Gord Johns: She has priority.

The Chair: So it's Mr. Genuis, then Mrs. Vignola and then you.

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes, just leave it like that.

The Chair: Why don't you have your say, Mr. Genuis, and then we can go back to Mrs. Vignola, and then Mr. Kusmierczyk after Mr. Johns.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

Obviously, the majority of the committee will have its will, but I hope we have an opportunity to at least have some discussion here today, because I think there are a lot of important points that need to be aired on this.

I want to start by sharing a little bit of personal context. I haven't spoken on this issue yet, but it's personal for me. My grandmother was a Holocaust survivor. I share in the shock about what happened on Friday. I personally wasn't here when it happened. I only found out about it afterwards. For me growing up, knowing about the Holocaust and World War II was obviously really important. It was a part of my family's history, as well as world history. My parents always emphasized the importance of knowing about history, how learning about history is how we avoid repeating it, how we learn from the mistakes of history, and how it's especially important for us to learn about these darker moments in our collective history so we can prevent these grave evils from repeating themselves.

The promise that was made to my grandmother's generation, the promise of "never again", of not allowing genocides to happen in the future, is one we have obviously failed to deliver on. We have rising anti-Semitism around world, including here in Canada. By my count, there have been four instances in the time I've been a member of Parliament in which this House has recognized contemporaneous acts of genocide, so we know genocide continues. This, again, underlines the importance of knowing world history, of knowing our history, and of having that inform the decisions that our institutions make.

One of the things about this that are so shocking to me is that we have a whole apparatus of government that is responsible for security, for protocol, for ensuring the success of these visits. For any of the people involved in this process, it should just not have passed the basic smell test. The basic description of who this individual was—someone who fought against Russia during the Second World War—should not have passed a basic smell test. That should have led to any number of the people in RCMP protocol, the Prime Minister's Office and all those who were involved in this visit to ask more questions about it. In this country, there's a whole painful history of conflict around people who came to Canada who had been members of the Waffen-SS, so for people to not have known that history....

I think we need to underline that the Prime Minister is ultimately responsible for this apparatus. House of Commons security reports to the RCMP, and I think this is important from a process perspective. I understand that some members want to say this isn't a government operations issue but a procedure and House affairs issue. I agree with my colleague who said the procedure and House affairs committee is already seized with the issue of foreign interference, and pushing this over to procedure and House affairs is, I think, frankly, a way of trying to bury the discussion of it.

Moreover, this isn't just a question of procedure and House activities. This is a question of the operations of government and therefore we need to be looking at the operations committee. It suits the

framing of some members, who want to avoid looking at the responsibility of the government and government operations for this outcome, to say that, no, it's just the House of Commons.

This was a state visit. The House of Commons is used for these kinds of addresses, but formally speaking, the House of Commons isn't sitting. We have people on the floor who are not members of Parliament. We understand that, formally speaking, the House doesn't sit. We have a foreign leader addressing the House within the House of Commons. This very much, I think, raises important questions of government operations. How did this happen from a government operations perspective?

• (1600)

So when members say it should be put over as a procedure and House issue, it's not a procedure and House issue fundamentally. It is more fundamentally a government operations issue, and we need to be able to ask those government operations questions, which I think include looking at how there was such historical ignorance within the processes that, ultimately, are the responsibility of the Prime Minister and the government, such ignorance of the debates that have happened in Canada around the Waffen-SS and of the history of the Holocaust itself.

Chair, the sad thing is that we are living through a time when the term "Nazi" is regularly thrown around as a political insult, apparently by people who don't seem to have a basic understanding and recollection of the history of Nazism. This is deeply troubling and it contributes, I think, to the concern about what happened last Friday.

I want to put on the record, as well, that it's important to underline what we're talking about in terms of the Waffen-SS. Some articles have referred to the person who was in the House as being someone who fought alongside Nazi Germany, and this grossly understates the full picture. The SS was the paramilitary unit of the Nazi Party that was personally loyal to Hitler. The SS was not just a unit within the German army; it was a paramilitary organization of the Nazi Party that was personally loyal to Hitler. It was deployed in all kinds of the most horrific, unimaginable atrocities, and it was used as a personal vehicle for exercising power.

It was there, in part, so that if there was agitation against the regime from within the army, the SS could be deployed. It was personally loyal to the Nazi Party and to Hitler. This is, of course, historically important, because we know that, as a result of the Valkyrie plot, there was agitation within the German military. The SS was deeply evil and was responsible for some of the most horrific atrocities in human history, and this is the case of an individual who voluntarily enlisted with the SS in 1943. He chose to enlist with the SS in 1943.

My colleague referenced the Nuremberg trials, and I just want to share a number of quotes from the Nuremberg trials so we understand what we are talking about here: "It is impossible to single out any portion of the SS which was not involved in these criminal activities.... The tribunal finds that knowledge of these criminal activities was sufficiently general to justify declaring that the SS was a criminal organisation to the extent hereinafter described."

It also states:

There is evidence that the shooting of unarmed prisoners of war was the general practice in some Waffen SS divisions.... Units of the Waffen SS and Einsatzgruppen operating directly under the SS main office were used to carry out these plans. These units were also involved in the widespread murder and ill-treatment of the civilian population of occupied territories[.] Under the guise of combating partisan units, units of the SS exterminated Jews and people deemed politically undesirable by the SS, and their reports record the execution of enormous numbers of persons. Waffen SS divisions were responsible for many massacres and atrocities in occupied territories such as the massacres at Oradour and Lidice.

Chair, again, we have a situation in which the term “Nazi” is increasingly thrown around as a political insult on Twitter, on social media and in other places, even by political leaders, but we have, I think, a declining understanding of the horrors of this period and of the roots and causes of this totalitarian evil. I would commend to all members of the public the importance of understanding history and understanding this period in particular as we commit ourselves to the principle of “never again”.

As the government operations committee, we need to understand what happened as a matter of government operations. If members want to make the case that the Prime Minister is not responsible or that government operations are not associated with what happened, then they can make that case, but let's not bury it. Let's not hide it. Let's not pretend there aren't questions about the operations of government that need to be asked and considered. Now is not the time for excuses or for punting it to other committees. Government operations is the place to do it because it's a government operations issue and because there are already issues on the table at procedure and House affairs.

• (1605)

I hope members will consider this reality and take a stand for remembering and learning from history, getting to the bottom of what happened and holding powerful people accountable for this grave stain on our national reputation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks.

Before you start, Mrs. Vignola, we are actually still speaking on your amendment, which is to adjourn and to write the letter asking PROC to do it, and that will continue until there is no one else on the speaking list. I'm not sure if Mr. Johns and Mr. Kusmierczyk wish to speak on that still, which is to adjourn and write the letter to PROC, but if—

Mr. Gord Johns: Could we get clarification? I'm looking for clarification only.

I think we're speaking on the motion to adjourn first. Are they grouped together?

The Chair: It's one motion.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay. Well, if it's a motion to adjourn, then it goes to a vote.

The Chair: It's to adjourn and write a letter, which is debatable. This is the direction I'm receiving from the clerk.

Unless we have consent to have Mrs. Vignola withdraw that amendment.... It was to write the letter and adjourn, so that becomes not just a straight adjournment, which would force us to go straight to a vote on it.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: The motion I moved was to adjourn the debate. I said it was to consider the idea of writing a letter so that the motion could be referred to another committee. I did not say that this idea had to be included in the motion.

I want to make a motion to adjourn the debate, period. If my motion is considered to include the idea of thinking about writing a letter, I'll remove that part. I only want a motion to adjourn the debate. Don't put words in my mouth, please.

[*English*]

The Chair: We require UC from the committee to withdraw that.

I assume we have that, colleagues, to withdraw the whole thing—to adjourn the debate on the motion and to write the letter. We have UC, so we've withdrawn that.

(Amendment withdrawn)

The Chair: Now, Mrs. Vignola, you have the floor again because you put up your hand, and then we can get to Mr. Johns.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, it looks as though you've put down your hand.

Go ahead, Mrs. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Now that we've removed the pseudo-motion that combined two things, I'd now like to make a motion to adjourn the debate, please.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. I realize that was the original intent, but, procedure being procedure, we had to follow that, so thank you.

We'll go to a quick vote on adjourning the debate on Mrs. Kusie's motion.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3)

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you for your patience, colleagues. The motion to adjourn debate is carried.

We're going to start a new speaking list.

Mr. Genuis, did you have your hand up?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No. I just said, “Shame.”

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I think we all want the same thing here. We want accountability for what happened and to make sure it never happens again. This is important to every member at this committee. It's absolutely critical. I think Mrs. Vignola was going along that thread, absolutely.

What we want is to make sure this goes to the right place. It's really clear that according to PROC's mandate, it studies and reports—

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mrs. Block, go ahead.

I'm sorry, Mr. Johns.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

Just on a point of clarification, if a motion to adjourn the debate has passed, is it your intention that we continue on with the debate, as it appears Mr. Johns is doing?

The Chair: No. The debate is adjourned. We opened the floor for speaking order. My assumption was that we were going to go to motions, but Mr. Johns is addressing something else. Perhaps he is following up on Mrs. Vignola's suggestion that we write to PROC about this, if I'm guessing right.

I'll let Mr. Johns continue.

Mr. Gord Johns: Absolutely, that's exactly where I want to go, in the spirit of what Mrs. Kusie has brought here today.

What this committee wants—what everybody wants—is to make sure that this is looked at, that it's done properly and that there's accountability. We'll find out what happened, what went wrong, where the gaps are and how to fix them so this never ever happens again. We need to make sure it lands at PROC. That is the role of PROC. The whole role of PROC is to ensure that the internal administration of the House—services and facilities for MPs—is run with proper rules and practices that protect the House and the members so something terrible and shameful like this never happens again.

I move that we write a letter to PROC asking them to do a study on this.

I don't think we should determine for PROC whom they should invite and how many meetings they should have. However, we want this to be their top priority. We know they're undertaking a lot of really difficult studies. It is a challenging job. They have as many as this committee. We have eight studies going on here as well. I want to make sure that we get this to PROC and that we write in the letter that this is an absolute priority of this committee and that we ask PROC to take this on and study this urgently.

This is what I would be calling for: “Given the international embarrassment created by the Speaker of the House of Commons by allowing a former soldier of a Nazi military unit in World War II to attend and be recognized during the President of Ukraine's special address to Parliament on Friday, September 22, and that proper vetting was either not done or this individual's military record was ignored, that the PROC committee hold hearings to look into this matter and that the PROC committee hear witnesses to ensure that

this never happens again and that they update their rules and regulations when it comes to vetting of guests attending a visitation by any foreign dignitary.”

• (1615)

The Chair: I apologize, but I missed a bit of what you were saying.

Just to be clear, we cannot direct; we can only suggest to other committees. I missed the verb in what you were—

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes. In the preamble, I would say that we recommend to PROC to do the rest of what I outlined, which is very similar to what Mrs. Kusie put forward. We're talking about a few words.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, go ahead.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order before I speak, can I ask the clerk to read out the motion as she understands it so that we're sure we're debating the same thing?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Aimée Belmore): I would sincerely appreciate it if Mr. Johns could just reiterate it. I could give you what I have, but it is....

Mr. Johns moved that the chair of the OGGO committee write to the chair of the PROC committee to recommend that PROC study and alter their rules....

I would really appreciate some assistance filling in the blanks.

Mr. Gord Johns: The only changes I would make to Mrs. Kusie's motion would be that in the preamble we would be writing to PROC and recommending that PROC.... We'll keep the first part, but I would cross out “the Liberal Government” and put “the Speaker of the House of Commons”, because it was the Speaker. Then for the rest, I would continue on as is stated in Mrs. Kusie's motion. I can read it if you'd like.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we adjourned debate on that motion, so you can't....

Mr. Gord Johns: This is writing a letter, so this is a different motion. It's not on this motion. It's drafting a letter to PROC, so it's different from the motion, which is to have a study here. It is very different. It's writing a letter recommending that PROC consider doing a study, given the international embarrassment. For the rest we could use.... I would take out only a couple of lines, different from what Ms. Kusie put forward in her preamble, in terms of the recommendations around the letter. I can't see it being.... It's very different from what was put forward in terms of the motion before, which was to do a study. This is a motion to write a letter to another committee, which should be allowable.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Chair, on a point of order, Mr. Johns has the floor and he has a right to move a motion, but it does seem that there's some uncertainty about the text of the motion. I don't want us to delay for a lot of time, but I might suggest a five-minute recess so that we can actually have the text and know what we're debating.

The Chair: Okay. Would you mind if we suspend for five minutes?

We're suspended.

• (1615) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1625)

The Chair: Colleagues, we are back.

Mr. Johns, please start again. You have the floor. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you for your patience, everybody. I really like seeing that we're trying to work together to get through this.

I move this motion:

Given the international embarrassment created by the Speaker of the House of Commons by allowing a former soldier of a Nazi military unit in World War II to attend and be recognized during the President of Ukraine's special address to Parliament on Friday, September 22, and that proper vetting was either not done or this individual's military record was ignored, that the chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates write to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to suggest that they hold hearings to look into this matter to ensure that there are safeguards in place so that this never happens again.

The Chair: Did everyone hear that? Do you have the wording?

Yes, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry. I have a point of order. I don't require it if we don't have enough time, but can it be distributed in writing? Is it available?

The Chair: We don't have it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry. Could it be read one more time? That should be....

The Chair: Shall I have our clerk read it out?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I will propose some amendments, as well.

The Clerk: I'm just going to read it slowly, so that the interpreters, who don't have the text, can keep up with me:

Given the international embarrassment created by the Speaker of the House of Commons by allowing a former soldier of a Nazi military unit in World War II to attend and be recognized during the President of Ukraine's special address to

Parliament on Friday, September 22, and that proper vetting was either not done or this individual's military record was ignored, that the chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates write to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to suggest that they hold hearings to look into this matter to ensure that there are safeguards in place so that this never happens again.

Is that correct, sir?

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes, it is.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a broad level, I do want to underline that I think it is somewhat absurd for our committee to decide not to study something and then to say that we're going to write to another committee to tell them what a great priority it is and what a great priority it should be for them, but we're not going to study it ourselves.

I don't want to speculate on the motives of specific people, but I think the effect of sending this to PROC is that PROC will have to contend with the foreign interference issue and the privilege issue involving threats to Mr. Chong's family, which is also an urgent priority. They will have to contend with how to balance multiple different matters, one of which they have been directed by the House to look at.

I also think it's clear from this motion that there is continuously an effort to position this as a procedure and House and Speaker issue as opposed to a government operations issue, and that is about taking accountability away from the Prime Minister and the government that oversee security in the House.

Again to underline, the Standing Orders don't apply when we have foreign visitors addressing the House. Members can go back and look at the record of how foreign visits come about. The House decides not to sit on that particular day, and the fact that the House is not sitting then allows an address by, in this case, President Zelenskyy, or, in other cases, other foreign leaders. Every time this has happened, there has not been a formal session of the House of Commons governed by the Standing Orders. If a member had tried to raise a point of order during those proceedings, they would not have been able to because the House was not sitting.

There are senators but also many members of the public who are on the floor during that time, so to suggest that this is a procedural issue and not a government operations issue, to suggest that all the fault belongs on the chosen scapegoat, I think, is missing the point and suggests that we're solving this by sending a letter to another committee.

That said, I do want this study to happen. I think the study is really important, so I guess we have to make a determination about whether to say this is better than nothing. However, I would say it's not that far from nothing.

I'm going to propose a couple of amendments to try to beef up the motion a little bit. The first amendment I will propose concerns where, in the middle of the motion, it suggests that PROC study this. I'd like to amend it to suggest that they create a subcommittee to hold hearings, and then it would continue as it is otherwise.

The creation of a subcommittee to do this work would allow the study to begin right away and would spare PROC, if they decided to go down this road, from needing to determine whether to study this or foreign interference.

Members may say that's for them to decide, but since we're sending them a letter, I think we should provide that recommendation. Of course, it's as non-binding as any other recommendation that would come from this committee, which underlines my overall frustration with this method, but I will propose that amendment initially, which I think substantially improves the motion because it solves one problem with it.

Thanks.

• (1630)

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Johns.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have one or two other amendments that I have to flesh out, but I'll put this one on the table first.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Johns. Go ahead.

Mr. Gord Johns: The mandate for PROC cites that the Procedure and House Affairs Committee studies and reports on the rules and practices of the House and its committees, electoral matters, questions of privilege, MP conflicts of interest, internal administration of the House, and services and facilities for MPs.

This is their mandate. This is why I'm recommending it, to make sure it goes to the right place. I'm not trying to say that we shouldn't do this. I want this study, actually. I think we're very supportive of getting to the bottom of this. We want accountability.

In terms of the amendment and the subcommittee, I like the idea, and I think that if Mr. Genuis would consider "if necessary" before "that the subcommittee expedite a study" or something to that effect it would be welcome, because we want to demonstrate to PROC, obviously, that this is urgent and that, if they don't have the capacity at committee, they can create the subcommittee. I support fully what he's doing with the subamendment.

The Chair: Are you moving an amendment to his amendment?

Mr. Gord Johns: I hope it's a friendly....

The Chair: I think Mr. Genuis has some other changes. Perhaps if he's fine with that he can adopt that at the same time.

Before we go to Mr. Genuis, Mr. Kusmierczyk, did you have your hand up? Were you talking about Mr. Johns' motion?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Yes. Thank you, Chair.

There seems to be agreement on the floor here, but I would just urge caution that we not direct PROC in terms of its internal deliberations. It understands this issue very well. It understands the processes very well.

I like Mr. Johns' original motion. It's very simple. It's very clear. It communicates very clearly the urgency and the importance of this matter to the OGGO committee, but it allows the PROC committee to determine on its own how best to proceed. I would say that the original motion that Mr. Johns put on the floor is crisp and it's clear. It allows PROC to determine the how.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Chair, formally there's no such thing as a friendly amendment, but I'm comfortable with Mr. Johns' proposed subamendment, which I understood him to have moved.

Of course, this motion empowers you to write the letter as you see fit. I think the goal of the amendment and subamendment is to capture the idea that, respecting the importance of the work they're doing on foreign interference, the consideration of the subcommittee would be a recommendation. You can turn those two pieces into an appropriate letter.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues. You seem fine with that.

Your original comment was perhaps other.... Are you...?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can we pass the subamendment and the amendment now by unanimous consent?

The Chair: I think we're fine with that.

Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): What are we actually voting on?

The Chair: It's to see if we're fine with the subamendment to the amendment, which was to add "if necessary".

I have Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm sorry. I thought we had an agreement on that.

My question for Mr. Johns is—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt. Are you commenting on the subamendment? We're hoping to see if we have agreement to the subamendment.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: No, I'm not commenting on that.

Can you come back to me after that?

The Chair: I will.

Have we accepted the subamendment?

Mr. Genuis, are you speaking to the subamendment?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, the subamendment is accepted. I think we have accepted the amendment as well—

The Chair: I'm asking that. Before I even continue you have your hand up, before we can even close the subamendment.

Are we fine with the subamendment, colleagues?

(Subamendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Perfect.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Secondly, the language in our original motion said, "Given the international embarrassment created by the Liberal Government". This was replaced in the proposed motion of Mr. Johns by saying, "Given the international embarrassment created by the Speaker".

I don't agree with his framing. I suspect he wouldn't agree with my framing.

In the interest of consensus language, how about we amend it to say, "Given the international embarrassment created by allowing a former soldier of a Nazi". It's essentially taking out the giving of blame one way or the other. I think that gives us something that we're all comfortable with.

The Chair: It's taking out "by the Speaker" or "by the government".

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, it's just taking out "by the Speaker" so that it reads, "Given the international embarrassment created by allowing a former". I don't think that just trying to lay it at the Speaker's feet is accurate, but I'm not going to propose what is obviously a minority view on who's responsible either. I think that if we want to get to a consensus, let's try to get it there. That's the amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Kusmierczyk, this is on Mr. Genuis's just removing the word "Speaker". In the original one, it would be removing "Government".

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I disagree. I believe that Mr. Johns'.... Again, I go back to his original intent, including the fact that the words that it was caused "by the Speaker" are, I believe, the most accurate version of what transpired. I would prefer that we stick with that, but I do have one small amendment that I would like to propose as well, and I think it's a critical one.

The Chair: Are you proposing a subamendment to Mr. Genuis's amendment, or can we deal with Mr. Genuis's amendment first and then you can propose your amendment?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: We can deal with Mr. Genuis's first, but I do hope, Mr. Chair, that you come back to me.

The Chair: I will consider your hand up.

Does anyone else wish to speak to Mr. Genuis's amendment?

If you notice, every time I say Garnett's name, I pronounce his last name differently, so I hope you're all keeping track. I think I'm up to nine.

Does anyone else wish to speak on Mr. Genuis's amendment, which is basically removing "Speaker" or the original "Government"?

Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I would prefer not to remove it, but if it's a pathway for us to getting through this, working collectively, I absolutely would support it. We need to work together here, and I think that is a way forward. I think we need a pathway forward. We're sending a letter to PROC. Let them figure out what they want to do in terms of how they want to conduct this study, but we're encouraging them to move quickly on this. I think that's generally what we're trying to agree on here.

I appreciate Ms. Kusie's bringing this forward, because this is a really important issue. We need PROC to make this—

• (1640)

The Chair: I appreciate that compromise, Mr. Johns.

Can we go to a vote on Mr. Genuis's amendment, please, which is, again, just taking out the word "Speaker", which modifies the original motion, which took out "Government".

I have Madame Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to make sure I understand this correctly. We would remove the word "Speaker" and the words "Liberal government," is that correct?

[*English*]

The Chair: The original motion took out "Government". Then it proposed to put in "Speaker". This amendment would take out "Speaker", so we would not have "Speaker" or "Government". It would just say, "Given the embarrassment created by allowing a former soldier".

Colleagues, can we go to a vote on that?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Could we have a recorded vote, Chair?

The Chair: We'll have a recorded vote, and then we'll go to Mr. Kusmierczyk, please, after the vote.

The Clerk: The vote is five yeas and five nays.

The Chair: I will vote in favour.

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

The Chair: Mr. Kusmierczyk had an amendment. We will discuss that.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I understand that the first line of the sentence as it currently stands in the motion is "Given the embarrassment". I would also move a friendly amendment to add the word "hurt", so it would be "Given the hurt and embarrassment". Fundamentally, it's important.

For the people who were hurt by this—be they Jews, Poles or other victims of Nazi atrocities—I think that is our driver: that we prevent such hurt from being repeated. I think it's important that we include that word.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have one more amendment, last one.

The Chair: We have, hopefully, the last amendment to this.

• (1645)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, this is my last amendment.

I'm going to propose that at the end of the motion we add “and report this motion to the House.”

The reason I think this is important is that we can send a letter to PROC, but a report to the House provides an opportunity for the House to pronounce on wanting this study to take place. I think that may be important to ensure it happens. We don't want this issue buried. We want this study to happen, and a report to the House provides the opportunity for the House to express itself on the matter. That's why I think it's important. I hope that will be agreeable to members.

Thanks.

The Chair: Mr. Johns, go ahead on this amendment.

Mr. Gord Johns: You know me—I think every report should go to the House eventually, so I think this is something we should all support.

The Chair: Colleagues, is there anyone else? Can we agree to this?

Go ahead, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Can I ask for a brief suspension of the meeting, please?

The Chair: Is five minutes fine, Mr. Kusmierczyk? Are you going to rush back in five minutes?

We will suspend for five minutes, colleagues.

• (1645)

(Pause)

• (1650)

The Chair: Colleagues, we are back.

Mr. Genuis, could you clarify the intent of your motion? My understanding is that it is to report the motion to the House, not for PROC. Could you clarify, please?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It does seem there's some confusion. My proposal was to amend the motion by adding the words “and report this motion to the House” to the end of the motion, which, if it's not clear, has the effect of reporting this motion to the House and not simply requesting that a subsequent report be done by another committee. I think this is important because when a committee reports a matter to the House, it provides the House an opportunity to pronounce on that matter.

Clearly, this would be a stronger approach than simply writing a letter to PROC. It would involve writing a letter to PROC but also

informing the House that we'd written a letter to PROC, and providing the House with an opportunity to pronounce on the matter.

Another option would be to add a request for a government response, which means effectively that we cannot do concurrence for four months. If people are concerned about it being used as a dilatory tactic.... Simply adding in the request for a government response would address that concern.

I think a letter is not good enough, which is what I said at the beginning. I think informing the House about this is an important step to actually working to get to the bottom of the matter.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Johns, go ahead.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm going to reiterate that it is PROC's mandate to look at this. This is their job. There's a reason we don't have one giant committee to cover everything. We have different mandates in different committees, and that's within PROC's mandate.

It's important that we send this letter. I think it's pretty clear that we want them to do it with urgency. I don't want to see this turn into this letter being tied up at the House of Commons for hours on end through concurrence. I think PROC has the message. This is a pretty clear message from our committee to say, “Do your job. This is your job. This is your mandate.”

I won't support the amendment. I've supported your other two amendments, Mr. Genuis.

I think we need to get to the end here, and I'm hoping we can. We're all supportive of the contents of the letter and what we're trying to achieve here, but I don't want this to become a tool, something outside the scope of our committee. Let's get this to PROC and highlight to PROC that we need them to take this on ASAP.

I really appreciate Mr. Genuis saying that if they don't have the capacity, because of their study on foreign interference, they could create subcommittees, if necessary, to take this on and move this forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns. I appreciate that.

Can we move to a vote on this amendment?

(Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 3)

The Chair: Mr. Sousa, go ahead.

• (1655)

Mr. Charles Sousa: I think all of us share the deep concern with what happened in the House. We all recognize that it's something we should have been better aware of so it would not have been exposed. I think we're all in agreement with that.

There is a piece of the submission that I think needs to be tweaked, because I think we all recognize that we want to get down to what occurred and how it should not have happened and not to presuppose that there's some blame or that somehow someone did something wrong. That's why we want it to be reviewed.

I would amend the portion where we're saying it was "ignored". That presupposes that it was known. I would amend that portion of the text.

The Chair: Do you have different wording, then, Mr. Sousa?

We can't just take out the words "was ignored". It says, "proper vetting was either not done or this individual's military record was ignored".

Mr. Charles Sousa: That presupposes the vetting. You're vetting to make certain the person was—

The Chair: I'm sorry. Maybe I misheard. I thought you said that you wanted to take out the word "ignored".

Mr. Charles Sousa: Well, take out...who he was. It's basically saying that there wasn't proper vetting, and then we go from there and take out the portion of it that somehow we knew that he was a vet and we purposely ignored his record, because you're presupposing that it was done. That's the issue we're trying to get at.

The Chair: It says, "proper vetting was either not done or this individual's military record was ignored", so they're saying either vetting wasn't done or it was done and his record was ignored.

Mr. Charles Sousa: That's correct.

The Chair: Do you want the entire line taken out?

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'd say "proper vetting wasn't done". I think that's the important piece here.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll get to you in a moment, Mr. Genuis.

So it would say, "during the President of Ukraine's special address to Parliament on Friday, September 22, and that proper vetting was not done on this individual's military record".

Mr. Charles Sousa: On this individual or any individual.... We are again presupposing. Were there any others? We should make certain—

The Chair: Okay, so we have "and that proper vetting wasn't done", semicolon, and then it goes into me writing....

I have Mr. Genuis and then Mr. Johns.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I just don't see the problem with the existing language. The existing language says, "that proper vetting was either not done or this individual's military record was ignored". In other words, either the research wasn't done or the research was done but the results of that research were ignored. The existing language, I think, is inclusive of all possibilities. It doesn't say that his record was ignored. It says that either the proper vetting wasn't done or his record was ignored.

I don't see the need for the change. It does seem like word-smithing at this point, but I think the existing language is better.

The Chair: I have Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I hear where Mr. Sousa is coming from.

Look, we can all agree that there was no malice intended here. This is a horrible, horrible mistake. I think that by removing "this individual's military record was ignored".... Clearly, if anyone had identified this and connected the dots, it wouldn't have happened. If there were a proper vetting process in place, this never would have happened, which is the whole idea of writing the letter to PROC, so this never happens again and there's proper vetting in place. There's work to be done.

I would support Mr. Sousa's motion. I'm hoping that we can try to figure this out here, because we've tied up a whole meeting on this. It's important. I'm not saying that it's not important—it really is. Again, I appreciate Mrs. Kusie bringing this motion here for us to really cement to PROC how important this is to all of us as members of Parliament and this committee.

I would support Mr. Sousa's motion. I'm hoping that we can all come to an agreement here to move things along.

• (1700)

The Chair: Mrs. Block, go ahead.

Then I'm going to have our clerk read what we think Mr. Sousa has suggested.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Chair, I think it might be good for you to read that for me. What I think I heard is that we are going to keep in the letter that proper vetting wasn't done.

The Chair: Yes, that's right.

Mrs. Kelly Block: I think that is drawing a conclusion rather than leaving it open-ended. As my colleague Mr. Genuis said, it's one or the other. They need to figure that out. I think Mr. Sousa's amendment is actually more limiting.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks, Mrs. Block.

I'm going to have our clerk just read out what Mr. Sousa is proposing.

You can let us know if it's correct.

The Clerk: Sir, I do believe the word "either" might need to come out as well in order to make it make sense.

If you'll just allow me, I'll read from "Friday, September 22": "Friday, September 22, and that proper vetting was not done; that the chair of OGGO write to PROC to suggest that they create a sub-committee", and it goes on from there with the language that has already been agreed to by the committee. It would strike "either" and then strike "or this individual's military record was ignored", and it would be closed by a semicolon.

The Chair: Is that correct, Mr. Sousa?

Mr. Charles Sousa: That's correct.

The Chair: Is there anyone else, colleagues?

Can we vote on Mr. Sousa's amendment, please?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On division.

(Amendment agreed to on division)

The Chair: Are we clear on the final motion, or should the clerk read out what we think is the final amended motion?

An hon. member: We're fine.

The Chair: We're fine. All right.

Can we vote on the final amended and subamended motion?

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

The Chair: We will do up a letter and I will make sure everyone receives a copy. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Block, you were waving at me. Then it's Mr. Johns or Mrs. Vignola. I didn't see who was first. Let's go to Mrs. Block first, and then let me know who was first of the two of you.

Yes, Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: I assume this is the time at which we have the opportunity to table motions that were circulated to our committee members as a result of the conversations that we had at subcommittee. We said that once we established an agenda for dealing with the current studies that are ongoing, we would then look to members to put motions on notice for future studies they would like to see this committee undertake. With that, I would like to table a motion that was circulated to committee members on Tuesday.

The government recently announced that it was probing multiple companies that have allegedly been using Uyghur forced labour somewhere in their supply chain. These companies have allegedly been continuing to import goods that have used slave labour in their production process. Despite the international outcry and the condemnation from the Parliament of Canada, it seems that the Government of Canada has not taken the proper steps to ensure that goods produced using the products of forced labour are barred from entering the country.

Additionally, at recent hearings of this committee, members learned about government contracts with companies that engaged in unethical conduct but were still allowed to obtain sole-sourced contracts from the government and be cleared for multiple standing offers. I will note that the company in question, McKinsey, has recently reached yet another settlement of \$230 million U.S. to resolve more lawsuits due to its role in the opioid crisis. This is in addition to an earlier \$641.5 million in settlements paid out to resolve lawsuits. That a company such as McKinsey has access to exclusive government contracts is unacceptable.

The two issues I mentioned, which should be violations of the integrity regime, have occurred under this government. Whether this is due to a lack of effectiveness of the current integrity regime or a lack of enforcement, neither is acceptable.

With these issues in mind, I would like to move the following motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(c), the committee undertake a study of the integrity regime to review the effectiveness of the current rules and regulations to ensure that:

- I. The government of Canada is not entering into contracts or real property agreements with suppliers which are conducting unethical business practices and
- II. Businesses which engage in unethical business practices, are not able to undermine the fair competition and integrity of the Canadian economy.
- III. The use and expenditure of public funds is protected and safeguarded.

● (1705)

The Chair: The motion is in order. Does anyone wish to speak to this?

Yes, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'll be really quick.

I think this is a great motion. Does Mrs. Block want to include this, though, in the McKinsey study? There's a lot of stuff that could be woven in.

The Chair: Mrs. Block, Mr. Johns is asking if you're including it.

I didn't understand it that way. This is a stand-alone study.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm good with it.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I think this is a great study as well. It would be worthwhile for the committee to incorporate into this study evidence gathered from other studies. When we're looking at the integrity regime specifically, there probably are specific issues we need to look at structurally around the integrity regime that are quite distinct from one particular company. If it's the will of the committee, we can take that evidence and use it in the work we'll do on this study as well.

Canadians expect that when the Government of Canada is purchasing products, it's not contributing to slavery, violence and injustices around the world. I think most people would expect the government to try to stop those things but, at a minimum, that the government isn't complicit in those things through its procurement. There have been a lot of credible concerns raised that we're not doing nearly enough in this regard, so I would very much welcome the study.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): I have a couple of clarifying questions for Mrs. Block, if she can share her thoughts with us. How many sessions, and when are you thinking about launching this?

I ask that question because you were part of the subcommittee when we talked about outsourcing. We talked about PPE. We also talked about the fact that we have ministers coming and that the supplementary estimates (B) are coming. We also talked about the fact that for our next study, which we had prioritized before but then delayed over and over again, there were four sessions on procurement and diversity. I am very much interested to know how many sessions you're thinking about, and the timing of this.

The Chair: I will interrupt just quickly before we get to the question of how many meetings. Maybe we could just address the question of how many meetings. Then I'm going to suggest that, perhaps, if we can get to it and decide on it, we could look at the schedule among ourselves, at the subcommittee. I think there are a couple of other motions we want to get to.

I don't know if it has to be decided immediately, but maybe we'll go to Mrs. Block to answer how many meetings she is thinking of.

• (1710)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Chair, through you to my colleague who, of course, is part of the subcommittee, I recognize absolutely that we have most of our meetings already established until Christmas, perhaps, and that there are other items we would probably want to wrap up within this year. Without precluding any other conversations that we would have at the subcommittee, I would suggest that this come before this committee in the new year. I hope it will be a priority study for us when we get back in 2024.

I did not put the number of meetings in. I'm open to negotiating that. Perhaps it's something the subcommittee could even discuss when we next meet to look at the calendar going forward, once we've completed everything that's on our agenda. I know that's not definitive, but I'm very much open to negotiating the number of meetings.

The Chair: Are we fine with that? Thank you very much.

Mrs. Block, I want to thank you for bringing that forward. I think a couple of you were on the committee when we looked at Nucotech, which actually has a long and wide history of violating laws internationally but still got a contract. I am looking forward to that one.

Colleagues, can we all agree to this?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mrs. Vignola, I'll go to you and then to Mr. Johns.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'll jump in quickly.

I'd like to make a suggestion, since the Parliamentary Budget Officer can't be here on October 3. We don't know whether this meeting will be cancelled or not, but I like to be well prepared. So I'd like to suggest a short meeting with certain officials to discuss the replacement of the CP-140 Auroras with P-8A Poseidons. This meeting with officials could take place at the October 3 meeting. If this meeting is ever cancelled, we'll reassess the situation, but that's what I'd suggest.

I move the following motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(c), the committee undertake a study on the upcoming replacement of the CP-140 Aurora by the Boeing P-8A Poseidon; and that the committee invite to appear at a meeting: Mary Gregory, Assistant Deputy Minister of Industry, Simon Page, Troy Crosbie and Bill Matthews.

[*English*]

The Chair: Before we open it up, I suggest, colleagues, that if we get this agreed to, we will try. If we cannot, we will get them for another Tuesday. Again, as I mentioned, it's very iffy about Tuesday afternoon. If we have to cancel it, leave it with us to cancel and reschedule it for another date.

Just for context, this is in regard to the contract for Boeing P-8. There was controversy about Canadian companies looking to put a bid on it.

Would this be for just one day? Okay.

Colleagues, are we comfortable with that? If we can, for Tuesday, we will. Chances are we will not, but if we cannot, leave it to the clerk and me to assign another day.

Yes, Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Yes, I'm supporting having the officials come in for one day. I'm okay with that, so long as it is one two-hour meeting and it's with the officials.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Colleagues, thank you very much. I appreciate your flexibility with that.

Mr. Johns, speak fast.

Mr. Gord Johns: We're all dealing with the housing crisis. We're talking about it day in, day out. People are struggling to pay astronomical rents. The developer-driven model hasn't worked. Ms. Atwin got the butt end of it yesterday, when I identified that the private sector has not solved the unaffordable housing crisis anywhere in the world.

I understand the need for partnership. I know that all parties around this table have talked about partnership to create affordable housing with government buildings and government lands. I'd like to hear the spirit of that, because there are underutilized lands and buildings. It needs to be done with free, prior and informed consent, and it must be done with the inclusion of indigenous people in those decisions.

We need to make sure we can't have a repeat of the Greenbelt, where public lands end up in developers' hands. Public lands actually belong in public hands, so we want to make sure that happens. It happened in B.C. that Crown lands ended up in the private sector.

I want us to study it, and I'm going to move a motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study to identify opportunities within the Government of Canada's real property portfolio to build non-market housing; that the committee invite witnesses from the Treasury Board, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as well as the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister for Housing, Infrastructure and Communities; that the study should be at least four meetings; and that the committee report its findings to the House.

• (1715)

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I thank Mr. Johns for putting forward a motion on an important issue. It is very much his right during committee business to propose any motion he wants, but I would just respectfully ask if we could have a bit more time on this one, because the notice just came out this morning. We'd like the opportunity to review the motion a bit more and come back to the committee with our proposed approach on it.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I think Mr. Johns hit a home run with this proposal. We're ready to support this today.

I would simply ask if Mr. Johns would be amenable to including in the list of witnesses the new CEO of the Canada Lands Company, which basically works with partners to develop the federal land holdings, and also to including Canada Post. There have been some really innovative solutions: In Orillia, for example, Canada Post was maintained on the ground floor and affordable housing was built on top of the existing Canada Post building. I'd like to ask them to come in as well.

Again, I would ask that when we're looking at federal lands and real holdings, we consider including the Canada Lands Company, which I think is important, and also Canada Post.

The Chair: We're going to open up a speakers list for Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment.

Next is Mr. Johns, and then it's Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, could the amendment be read one more time?

The Chair: Could you repeat your amendment, Mr. Kusmierczyk? Then we'll go to Mr. Johns.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Yes, for the list of witnesses we would add the CEO of the Canada Lands Company, and we'd also include witnesses from Canada Post who could speak to potential partnerships with Canada Post land holdings in terms of building affordable housing quickly. An example is Orillia. Canada Post and Canada Lands Company are the two we're asking for.

The Chair: I appreciate your bringing up Canada Lands, because they have not been before OGGO in about six and a half years.

Mr. Johns, do you want to speak to the proposed amendment?

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm fine with the amendment. I hope everybody is.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Chair, since there wasn't the appetite to give us more time, can we have just a two- or three-minute suspension and then come back? I think we can still get it done by the end of the meeting.

The Chair: We'll suspend for a few minutes.

• (1715) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1720)

The Chair: Colleagues, we are back.

Very briefly, Mr. Johns, I just want to confirm that it's Standing Order 108(3)(c).

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes.

The Chair: Thanks very much, sir.

Yes, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I don't entirely agree with Mr. Johns' framing. Initially, I think we should be talking about the problem caused by government gatekeepers that have prevented housing from getting built, but we're very happy to do a study of issues around housing. Of course this is an important issue. We're not voting to endorse everything he said; we're voting on the motion.

I would just propose.... First of all, what I think will pass quickly is that we add, after "Communities", "and other witnesses". Is there agreement on that? I think that may be implied, but—

The Chair: We're on Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, I'm not sure if you heard—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Actually, I can ask for unanimous consent at any time.

Is there unanimous consent to add "and other witnesses"?

The Chair: Yes, just as long as Mr. Kusmierczyk is listening in.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I'm sorry. Can you repeat that?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I am just going to add the words "and other witnesses" after the witness list, to make sure we're implying that members will submit witness lists.

The Chair: Are we fine with Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment, and then we'll amend it further?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: We can adopt his amendment, and we can add "and other witnesses" as well.

Is that agreeable?

The Chair: Let's start with Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment. I think I see everyone in agreement with Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment.

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Mr. Genuis has a further one, just adding "and others".

Are we all in agreement, colleagues?

(Amendment agreed to)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Then I have just one more suggestion, that we—

The Chair: Hold on for just a few seconds.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: I'm sorry. Just as a clarification, we've added the CEO of Canada Lands; we've added Canada Post, and then we've added "others".

The Chair: That's where we stand right now.

Mr. Genuis, if you have others, let's put them all at once.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, this is the last one. After "real property portfolio to build", I propose that we add "market and" before "non-market housing".

We're looking at a study to identify opportunities. We can look at the arguments for and against market and non-market housing, what's appropriate and in what context, but I would suggest that in the context of the study we look at the possibility and the opportunities for both. That will provide a broader look at the situation and the opportunities, and it will provide people with an opportunity to argue against market housing, if that's their view. Let's look at it as well. Let's not exclude it from consideration.

It would be revised to read, "a study to identify opportunities within the Government of Canada's real property portfolio to build market and non-market housing".

• (1725)

The Chair: I appreciate what you're saying. Just before we open it up, we should consider.... I will just mention quickly that Canada Lands does develop at-market housing, so if we are inviting them, perhaps it can be for that. I'm sure this subject will come up anyway, but I just wanted us to be aware that this is part of what they do as well.

I see Mr. Kusmierczyk is in favour.

Mr. Johns, do you want to speak to it?

Mr. Gord Johns: It'll be the only part we don't agree on.

I'm fine with not agreeing on the market piece of the motion. I know I'll get defeated here, and I'm fine with that.

Move it, and then let's get it over with so we can get on to the main motion.

The Chair: I agree, because there are a lot of aspects to the housing thing as well. I'd hate to exclude anything, but I appreciate that.

Colleagues, can we do this on division, on Mr. Genuis's suggestion to add the words "and market"?

(Amendment agreed to on division)

The Chair: Thank you for bringing that forward.

On the main motion, is it on division as well, colleagues?

An hon. member: I would like a recorded vote.

The Chair: Our colleagues the Liberals would like a recorded vote.

Mrs. Atwin, go ahead.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): I'm sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Chair, but I'd like to move that we strike the ministers from the motion.

The Chair: Well, we're actually at the point of voting on the final motion as amended and everything else, so we're past the amendments. We're doing a recorded vote on the motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Colleagues, thank you very much.

Please bear with me. Mrs. Vignola has something very important. I'm not sure if we'll have time, but if Mrs. Vignola would like to introduce the motion and if we can agree to it in the next two minutes, that's wonderful. If not, we will have to save it for another meeting.

Go ahead, Mrs. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'll speak quickly, Mr. Chair.

As we all know, we changed insurance companies over the summer and several issues were raised by the company's customers. The motion I'm putting forward is intended to shed light on what happened. That way, if we ever have to change companies again, we'll know what needs to be changed so we don't have to go through this again. There are probably some solutions we can already apply or suggest to ensure that we and the civil servants aren't caught up in an administrative maze when it comes to making an insurance claim, or even that we aren't put on hold indefinitely, if not forever, when we need to speak to a customer service representative from said company.

Here's the motion I'm moving:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(c), the committee undertake a study on the changeover of the Public Service Health Care Plan (PSHCP) from Sun Life to the Canada Life insurance company and that, to do so, the committee examine matters including

- 1) the quality of the insurance coverage, taking into account the circumstances and needs of federal public service employees,
- 2) the efficiency and effectiveness of the new insurance plan, particularly as concerns the online claims service and the telephone service offered to participants and health professionals,
- 3) the mechanisms that Public Services and Procurement Canada used in awarding the PSHCP contract to ensure the contractor had the capacity to serve the entire federal public service and provide the expected services, and
- 4) the measures that will be taken to correct the situation;

That the Committee allocate at least four meetings to conduct this study and that it invite to appear, for two hours per panel, the following witnesses:

- (a) the Minister of Public Services and Procurement at the time the contract was awarded to Canada Life (in March 2023),
- (b) the current minister and officials from Canada Life, and
- (c) any other witnesses it deems necessary; and

That the Committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Government table a comprehensive response.

I apologize to the interpreters for reading the text of the motion so quickly. I hope they had a copy in hand.

As with Mrs. Block's motion, this can be done after Christmas, but I think it's important that we look into it.

• (1730)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Jowhari has a very quick suggestion. Perhaps we'll get to that. Then either we'll pass it or we'll adjourn.

Yes, Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: We don't have an issue with this study. That's number one.

Number two is that we don't think it's going to take four sessions. We would actually like to remove the ministers and add the officials. Then, after hearing that, we can make a decision.

What we are studying in Mr. Genuis's motion is fine. We're suggesting that it won't be four sessions. We'll start with inviting the officials and everyone else for one session. Based on that, then we'll decide.

The Chair: Are you speaking to his proposed amendment or something else, Mr. Genuis? Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It is in this direction, but I don't know if we'll get it done in time.

My view is that if we're studying issues, it's important to hear from ministers. I've often found that officials are in the unenviable position of needing to defend the government line without having been responsible for it. That limits the kind of substantive dialogue that can advance. We can ask them technical questions, but we live in a system that's supposed to be based on ministerial responsibility, in which ministers are responsible for and direct the decisions that are made by their departments. I am fundamentally opposed to the idea that we would remove the opportunity to even briefly consult the ministers. If we're going to study an issue, let's have the spokesperson for the department, the person responsible for the department, address the committee.

I don't have a strong problem, in principle, with changing the number of meetings, but I would just underline that the issue of the ministers is important for us. If we're going to look at this issue, let's look at it properly.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Guys, there is no smoking gun here. There was a service contract that ended. There was an open bid. Nobody else but Canada Life bid on it. That's how it moved.

That's why I'm suggesting that we let the officials come to answer all the questions you have. If there is a smoking gun, we can

have other meetings, call ministers and do whatever we want. There is a simple answer for this, and we can hear it from the officials. If you're not convinced, then we can have a much deeper conversation on that.

We are out of time, but that's really the genesis of it. There was a contract. The contract ended. There was an open bid. Nobody else but Canada Life bid. That's it.

• (1735)

The Chair: Just very briefly, we have commitments from the ministers for two hours on their mandates, as well as another hour for the estimates, before the first week of December is up. We will have an opportunity that way. That's just an FYI.

Yes, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Maybe there's a smoking gun and maybe there isn't. To be honest, this issue is not my area of expertise at all. I'm just saying that if there's nothing to see here, then let's not do the study. If there's something to see here, then let's have the people responsible come to the committee.

I would be inclined to support doing this study, simply because if it's important to Mrs. Vignola, I think it's fair for her to get one of her studies in the mix. However, if we're going to do it, I would suggest including the ministers.

We have a lot on our agenda. We'll have the opportunity to ask some of these questions earlier, maybe when the ministers come to talk about their mandate letters, but we may not get to this study until well into the new year anyway. At that time, it would be appropriate to have the ministers back to explain that specific issue and where things are at that point.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I think there's a balance to be struck here. My colleague Mr. Jowhari has brought that balance forward.

We want to hear. We want to do this study. We think what Madame Vignola has brought forward is important, but at the same time, let's first hear from the officials. Let's get answers from them—basic, fundamental answers in terms of the nuts and bolts. If there is something we don't like, then let's ask for the ministers to come here.

I'd rather our ministers focused their time right now on crises like climate change, housing and others. As much as I'd love to see them in committee meetings, I'd rather have their attention focused on those things. Let's get officials in here first to start the study. Then, if there is something that is alarming or that requires further, deeper dives and answers, we'll call the ministers.

I think Mr. Jowhari strikes a very good balance for Madame Vignola. I'd like to see this—

The Chair: I'm sorry. Let me interrupt. I think we're not getting the translation.

What part did you miss?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: There was a lot of feedback when my colleague Mr. Kusmierczyk was speaking. I don't know if it was because he moved his microphone.

[*English*]

The Chair: Do you want him to start from the beginning? Where would you like him to restart?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: May I suggest that he repeat his last three sentences.

[*English*]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Chair, let me try that again. I'm going to keep this brief because I know we're running out of time here.

Is it okay now, Madame Vignola? I just want to get a thumbs-up from you. Are you hearing me clearly?

The Chair: Yes, we're good.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I want to say again that Mr. Jowhari struck a balance here in wanting to get this important study rolling and wanting to hear from the officials to get the basic nuts and bolts of what happened in this transition. If there are any concerning points or questions that remain unanswered, then we'll invite the ministers here.

I'd rather see our ministers focus on the issues and crises at hand, like housing, climate change and others. As much as I'd love to see

them here every single day and every single week, I'd like them focused on those challenges that Canadians want to see them focused on. I want to see this study move forward. Let's hear from the officials. Then, if we need to ask additional questions, we'll call on the ministers.

I would ask Madame Vignola to kindly strike the ministers from the original motion at this point.

The Chair: Mrs. Vignola, you had your hand up.

We're quickly going to run out of time here.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I think the wording of my motion is broad enough to please everyone. I would have been prepared to discuss the number of meetings, nevertheless there is a decision-making process to consider. I understand what my colleague is saying about the lack of choice, but I also wonder if we could have done something else.

As we are running out of time, I suggest that we postpone this discussion, discuss it amongst ourselves and come up with a proposal on which there is consensus.

• (1740)

[*English*]

The Chair: It sounds like we have an agreement, colleagues, that you will try to work this out among yourselves.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Do I need to propose a motion to adjourn the debate on my own motion?

[*English*]

The Chair: No. I will just adjourn the meeting.

Thank you very much, colleagues. We had some hiccups at the beginning, but we got through a lot. I appreciate that, and I appreciate the follow-up from all sides regarding Mrs. Vignola's requests.

We are adjourned.

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