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# Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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Chair: Mr. Ron McKinnon





## Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Thursday, September 29, 2022

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Simon Larouche):** Good morning.

I see a quorum.

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, cannot entertain points of order nor participate in debate.

We may now proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party.

[*English*]

I'm now ready to receive any motions for the chair.

Mr. Chiang.

**Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** I nominate Ron McKinnon for chair.

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Mr. Paul Chiang that Mr. Ron McKinnon be elected as chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried and Mr. McKinnon duly elected as chair of the committee.

[*English*]

**The Chair (Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.)):** Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Thanks, everyone, for your support.

I'd like to start by thanking the Honourable Jim Carr for his work to date bringing us along. We've done some great work together, and I appreciate his efforts and shall take guidance from them. I wish him well as he goes forward and deals with the health issues that he must face.

I would also like to note that Mr. Van Bynen will be joining us on an ongoing basis.

Welcome, Tony.

The original plan from last week was that today we would have the chief of the defence staff, but because of circumstances around the need to elect a new chair, that has fallen by the wayside. I understand that the chief of the defence staff will be available next Thursday, so I suggest that we proceed on that basis.

I also understand that the minister and officials will be available on this coming Tuesday to talk about Bill C-21, so we will continue on that basis.

I understand that there is a draft work plan in process that the clerk and analysts are working on. I hope to meet with the clerk and analysts early in the coming week, and we will distribute a work plan in due course.

Is there any comment?

Ms. Dancho, please go ahead.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to congratulate you on your new position. The Conservative caucus looks forward to working with you on these important issues that we're pursuing, and you have our full confidence that you will do an excellent job.

We certainly extend our well wishes to Mr. Carr and thank him very sincerely for his dedication to public safety on this file for the last year. Hopefully his health improves. We're hoping the best for him.

Colleagues, I would like to move a motion. It's not a contentious one. It is something that we've talked about already, but this is just to get the ball moving. I'll move it, and then I'll speak briefly to it.

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee begin the Saskatchewan Mass Murder Study by holding a two-hour meeting with officials and; that this meeting be held by Friday, October 7, 2022.

Colleagues, last week we passed a motion and agreed; we just did not agree on the parameters. However, there was some informal discussion—and I believe also discussion in committee—that there was openness to having at least the top officials come right away and then perhaps picking up a more extensive study in the new year, given that this is very much top of mind.

We all agreed, certainly in principle, that Canadians would appreciate that the public safety and national security committee show that we're taking this matter very seriously and that, at the very least and in short order, we could hear from top officials from both government and corrections and parole. We would be looking to have those top officials in particular next week to get that sense from them of what the issues were, why this happened and how we can improve the public safety of Canadians. Then we talked about perhaps having a more lengthy study and starting that in the new year, or whatever the consensus is from committee.

Conservatives do feel that, at the very least, we should have one meeting immediately to review the situation on the ground and how we could be proceeding to prevent this from happening in the future. I hope that is given your consideration and we can support it by consensus.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Damoff, please go ahead.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Thanks, Chair. Congratulations on taking the helm of this incredible committee.

Raquel, I'll tell you the concerns that I have on this. James Smith Cree Nation is still hurting badly from what happened in their community, and while I think we need to hear from these officials, when we brought the motion forward originally, what I had suggested is that we hear from them once we've done their review. At this point, if we hear from the Parole Board and CSC, their response is going to be that they're currently reviewing what happened, and we will not be able to get any answers. While I do recognize that this has been a horrible tragedy and one that the committee needs to look at, to rush to do this while the community is still dealing with the tragedy themselves and before we can get any kind of answers from the Parole Board or CSC doesn't make sense.

I'm hoping that you'll agree with that. We would certainly work with you to have them come as soon as they have done their report, which is what we did when we studied Marylène Levesque. We had both agencies come after they had done their review so we could question them on what they found. Right now, we're not going to get any answers.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Mr. MacGregor, please go ahead.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Thank you very much.

I also want to publicly state that I appreciated the Honourable Jim Carr's service to our committee. You have some big shoes to fill, Mr. Chair, but I know you'll do it well, and I'd like to offer my congratulations on your election as chair. On behalf of the New Democratic caucus—me, myself and I—I look forward to working with you at this committee.

To the motion at hand, I share Ms. Damoff's concerns about naming a specific date. I know that this committee had agreed to

launch this study when we met in camera two meetings ago, I believe. We did agree to that, but I think it might be more sensible if Ms. Dancho, Ms. Damoff, Ms. Michaud and I had an offline conversation to try to find out where we are with this to find the best place to put it.

I know committee officials are busy drafting a work plan for us, but I'm a bit hesitant to name a specific start date until this tragedy, which is still very raw in the community, has some time for some healing to happen, so I would echo those concerns. Nothing takes away from my intention to be fully committed to this study; I'm just a bit hesitant about naming a specific start date at present.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Van Popta and Madam Michaud are next.

**Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC):** Thank you.

Mr. McKinnon, congratulations on your appointment. I'm sure you're going to do a great job chairing this committee. We're all very co-operative, as you know. I send my regards to Mr. Carr as well, and I would like to thank him for his service to this committee and wish him well going forward.

I've heard several committee members say that the pain is still fresh and the hurt is still there, and that is used as an argument to delay the study. I would say exactly the opposite. People are so concerned because people are hurting, and the healing has to start. The best way to do that is to get answers to questions, and people have a lot of questions about how this happened and why this man was released. There are some technical reasons why he was released, but I think that we should take the earliest opportunity to hear from the Parole Board and the Correctional Service of Canada to get answers to these questions that Canadians are rightfully asking, and they deserve answers.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Van Popta.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I congratulate you on your election. I am very happy for you and delighted that we can continue to work together.

I, too, have already addressed my best wishes to Mr. Carr personally. I thanked him for the work he has done with us and wished him the best of luck in the future.

With regard to the motion, could we have a copy, virtual or hard copy? I don't know if I've got it right, but I think you'd like the study to start on October 7. We'll come back to that.

With regard to the study in general, I know that we had agreed a few meetings ago. However, I quite agree with what Ms. Damoff said, that the internal review is not quite finished, so it will be difficult to get answers from the different organizations at this stage.

Could the clerk advise us of the schedule for the next few weeks and the structure of our consideration of Bill C-21? I would like to know when we can start receiving witnesses at committee and where the schedule will take us if we start this study.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

I'll jump in on that question.

We are expecting to have the minister and officials next week, on Tuesday, in order to start the study on C-21. At this point, we are expecting to have the chief of the defence staff on Thursday.

Certainly, the longer-term plan for the committee will be largely taken up by C-21, which is our major priority at this moment. We did pass in committee the resolution to do a study on the situation in James Smith Cree Nation and the circumstances around that.

Mr. Clerk, did you have anything further to add to that?

• (1115)

**The Clerk:** I have nothing at this point.

Just so you know, we've worked with the analysts on a work plan, since we received all the witness proposals for C-21 from the committee members yesterday. We'll soon be ready to propose a calendar for the upcoming weeks.

In the meantime, I believe Ms. Dancho has requested to speak.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Go ahead, Ms. Dancho.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Clerk.

I appreciate the feedback and certainly the sensitivity surrounding those suffering in James Smith Cree Nation. I agree with my colleague Tako. I think his point was very well made.

We're open to the date, in answer to Ms. Michaud. I said it would be by the end of next week, so that first meeting would happen next week. The Conservatives would certainly like to see a robust study on this. We can bring in a lot of experts to help us understand how we can prevent this from happening in the future. I think that's quite important. It seems like we all agree on that.

My concern is that if we wait for the internal inquiry to occur, which, I believe, would be the third inquiry of this kind in two and a half years, it could be quite some time before it happens. It could be well into next year. I think that's far too long. I would appreciate it if committee members could agree that we ensure we have this first initial meeting, at least, within the next month. That would, perhaps, be fair. Certainly, we would like to see it next week.

One reason is that the public has not heard a robust response from the Parole Board, Corrections Canada or the governing officials on this. They have the right to hear those opening statements. I think the public would be well placed to hear that, particularly those in James Smith Cree Nation and Saskatchewan at large. That would only benefit the conversation. It would certainly show the

public that we are taking this very seriously and acting quickly on it.

That will also provide us a bit more time to get some great witnesses, academic experts and the like to take it up in the new year, perhaps, or the rest of it starting in December. I do think there is some urgency that the public hear a robust response from these agencies tasked with keeping us safe and that ultimately failed to do so.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

Please go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Those are all very good points, Ms. Dancho. I agree about the sensitivity and urgency around this.

My preference at this time would be to allow the committee officials to present us with a work plan. Once I have that in hand and can see what they are proposing, I'd be more than happy to have a conversation with you about how we fit this in.

At this time, I'm not ready to commit to a specific date next week, next month or otherwise until I see that work plan. I'm going to be very open to proposals from you, and Ms. Damoff, I'm sure. I'd still like to see what committee officials have been working on before I commit in any way.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Ms. Damoff, please go ahead.

**The Clerk:** It will be Mr. Shipley after that.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Mr. Chair, I'm just going to agree with what Mr. MacGregor said and reiterate that bringing the Parole Board, CSC and others to the meeting prior to them actually looking to see what happened is not going to give us or the country or the community any answers. I can't support having a meeting next week. I don't think we could anyway, because we already have two meetings scheduled. In terms of any kind of time frame, maybe once we get the work plan we can have a more robust discussion on how we fit this in.

We also have legislation coming before us that is important legislation. Let's try to work together, as we do so well, to hear from people. You can certainly get a commitment from me to hear from them immediately following the release of their report, but not before then.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Mr. Shipley, please.

**Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC):** Mr. Chair, very briefly, we've just had a bit of a chat here too. I understand that we have a brand new chair today, and we do have a lot of things coming up on our schedule, but I just want to reiterate that this was obviously, and I don't even need to say this, a very tragic and horrific incident that happened. There have been a lot of words and a lot of thoughts and prayers given towards this. It's nice to hear that everyone on this committee wants to take some action now and talk about it and see how we can resolve it. I do feel the sooner, the better, but in a good manner, so that we can do it properly.

I think I'll leave it to our lead, because we did have a mention that, yes, perhaps waiting for the work plan to do it properly would be good. But let's really not delay this. Let's get into this and show the people who've been affected by this that we are taking this seriously and we're going to get some results for them.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

Go ahead, Ms. Dancho.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Mr. Chair, it sounds like we've reached a bit of a consensus, so I propose just formally, or informally formally, that we get the work plan and that we commit as a committee to at the next meeting setting some time aside for committee business and seeing where we can fit this in before the holidays come. That seems far away, but it really will come very quickly, as we know.

If we can get just a general consensus to agree to that—that once we get the work plan, at our next meeting we set aside some committee time and we hammer out a time when we can hear from these officials—that would be our proposal.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

At this point, we do have a motion on the floor. I think, from what has been said, there is a will to withdraw that motion.

Do we have unanimous consent to withdraw that motion at this time?

Go ahead, Ms. Dancho.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Mr. Chair, before we agree to withdraw it, can we just hear...? We would agree to withdraw it if we agreed in principle to what I've just proposed.

**The Chair:** Very well.

Does anyone wish to speak to that question?

**The Clerk:** Ms. Michaud would like to speak.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Michaud, you have the floor.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I tend to agree with what Ms. Dancho has just said. When we all have the work plan in front of us, we will be able to decide where it can fit into the agenda. On the other hand, I expect the study on Bill C-21 to be quite long. We have a lot of witnesses to hear and we will have amendments to consider. Even with the work plan in front of us, I think it will be difficult to put our finger on a date. However,

we can still do it. If we withdraw the motion today and decide on a date together, that is fine with me.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

Ms. Damoff, please go ahead.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Mr. Chair, I have just a comment and a question, I guess, for Ms. Dancho.

You're suggesting that we cut short the minister's appearance on Tuesday in order to deal with committee business and the calendar, or would it make more sense to do it...? We're hoping to have him here Tuesday on Bill C-21, which I think we all agree is an important piece of legislation.

Perhaps our new chair could schedule something on Thursday, following the hour with the chief of the defence staff. We're hoping he can appear on Thursday morning.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Mr. MacGregor, please.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Mr. Chair, I'm not in favour of cutting any time from the minister and his officials. I think we all want to maximize our two hours there.

Time is a valuable currency in parliamentary business. Once you spend it, you don't get it back. One thing I will commit to is having a conversation with the Conservative colleagues on this committee off-line and seeing if we can arrive at a consensus so that when we do come to a committee meeting to decide on this, we're pretty much all aligned.

I'll commit to that, Ms. Dancho.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Ms. Dancho.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the comments from Ms. Damoff, Mr. MacGregor and Ms. Michaud.

We always have great off-line conversations and build a lot of consensus there. It saves us a lot of time. I would agree that we do not want to cut into Mr. Mendicino's time at committee. It's very valuable. I was thinking that we would add another half an hour or 15 minutes to the end of a committee. I know we have had resources do that in the past. Again, I'm very open.

I'm just not familiar with when we're going to get the work plan. In fact, we didn't get firm confirmation until just now from Ms. Damoff of what we were looking at next week. Perhaps the clerk could let us know when we can expect that work plan.

What we can certainly commit to is meeting off-line, but I would like consensus that we will get a date in there before the holidays at the very least, and preferably in the next month. If we can just get the commitment from everyone that we will hear from these officials before the new year at the very minimum, that would be acceptable for us to withdraw that motion.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

I will be meeting with the clerk next week about the work plan. We will do our best to get it facilitated and distributed to the committee as soon as possible.

In any event, do I take it we have unanimous consent to withdraw Ms. Dancho's motion?

I'm seeing agreement, I believe, around the table.

**The Clerk:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Dancho. We'll consider your motion withdrawn.

(Motion withdrawn)

**The Chair:** I understand that you will be meeting with the other leads on this matter and will come up with a consensus. We will do our best, from the chair's perspective, with the clerk and analysts, to get that work plan out ASAP.

Are there any other comments, questions or concerns?

Ms. Dancho.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Mr. Chair, can we just get confirmation on what next week is going to look like? Can you walk us through what's been confirmed, please?

**The Chair:** As currently proposed, we will have the minister and officials on Tuesday for the full meeting. I don't believe the minister will be there for the full meeting. That is pretty normal for the start of looking at a new bill.

We have, I believe, confirmation of the chief of the defence staff for an hour for the following Thursday.

That potentially leaves an hour at that time to discuss other things such as committee business of this sort.

Does that work? Okay.

Are there any further comments?

Seeing none, I thank you all for your diligence and your hard work.

With that, we are adjourned.

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