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Chair: Mr. Pat Finnigan



Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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• (1545)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.)): We're live. Welcome back.

Go ahead, Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to my colleagues for allowing us to go public. I'm just going to get my bagpipes and we'll get the blues going.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to table a motion for a study within the agriculture committee.

I think everyone has it in front of them. It was put on notice a couple of weeks ago. I believe this is something that's very timely for us as an agriculture committee with the numbers that are now coming out from associations like CAPP and Saskatchewan Egg Producers, and now from Ontario and other groups. Now we have some data to go with this, and certainly with the harvest that we've had this year, I think this is quite timely.

Do I need to read the motion into the record, Mr. Chair, or does everybody have it in front of them?

The Chair: We have it in both languages.

Let's go ahead and read it.

Mr. John Barlow: My motion is as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, in light of the Agriculture Minister's public comments on needing more evidence of how the federal carbon tax is affecting farmers, and given the current fuel charge exemption under the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act does not include all fuels used on farms; that the Committee undertake a comprehensive study of the cumulative impact the federal carbon tax has on farming operations across Canada; that the study include an assessment of current agricultural practices and innovation already in place to improve conservation, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve management of the carbon cycle; that the study consist of at least 8 meetings; that the Committee at minimum hear from the Minister of Agriculture and department officials, producers, farm groups, commodity groups, provincial Agriculture Ministers and the Parliamentary Budget Officer; that the Committee report its findings, including its recommendations, to the House and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee request that the Government table a comprehensive response to the report.

That is my motion. Mr. Chair, I think I've explained why. I think all of us on this committee would certainly have had calls or have met with representatives from our agriculture stakeholders over the last several months. The impact of this is profound. There's no getting around it.

I think the thing that we hear most often from our stakeholders is that they're not getting credit for the things they have done, or are doing, when it comes to carbon capture and storage, water conservation and those types of things. The question they're asking is whether they could somehow show evidence and data that they're doing more than what they're being charged, and get credit for some of those things.

Last night, a constituent from my riding sent me reams of documents on the carbon tax he is paying. It's albeit a larger operation, but it is \$950,000 from now to the time 2022 arrives—it's unaffordable.

We are causing our producers irreparable harm if we continue down this road, and I think there is another way we can get around this, if we have definitive data and can show the minister what this is costing. We could give the government a good reason why there should be some exemptions, because of the carbon capture, because of the stewardship that they are doing.

Until we have data, until we can provide that to the minister, it's very difficult for her to make that decision. I think that's why this motion is so timely.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

You've heard the motion. Are there any comments on it?

We have Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): I'd like to propose an amendment to Mr. Barlow's motion.

I'll seek some advice from you and perhaps the clerk on what is allowed. I didn't have the chance to have it translated, but I do have it here in English. I was wondering whether that could be something I could pass to the committee.

Mr. John Barlow: Sure.

Mr. Kody Blois: I'm willing to be flexible on the language: "That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recognize that in order for the Government of Canada to meet its Paris Climate Accord, investments in rural communities, particularly the agriculture sector, will be key. Therefore, the committee shall study ways in which the Government of Canada can partner, support and/or invest directly on farms, to help farmers and producers reduce energy costs and adopt new technologies to reduce GHG emissions. The committee shall also study existing sustainability, carbon capture and GHG reduction initiatives already being used and practised by farmers and explore whether these could be expanded. The committee shall allocate at least eight meetings towards a study, unless a majority of its members agree otherwise. The committee shall allow, but is not limited to, industry stakeholders, experts and farmers to provide testimony on best practices, and to take into consideration the opportunities for investment to reduce GHG emissions across many different agricultural sectors, and that the committee prepare a report of its findings, including recommendations, to be tabled to the House."

I guess what I would say on the record, as it relates to the fact of the price on pollution having an impact on farmers, is that I would like us to study how government can help farmers make that transition. How can we invest directly to make sure we can continue to move our environment mandate forward without being punitive, as I'm sure some of the members of your party suggest in the House day after day? That's where I think we should put our efforts.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Now we have the amendment on the table. My only comment is that I appreciate that Mr. Barlow inserted some language in there that will guide our study towards the carbon sequestration efforts of farmers. I think those efforts have largely been cast aside in the debate on the carbon tax. It's pretty incredible when you look at the statistics of how well-managed agricultural practices can really put a lot of carbon into the ground.

I think there are some real opportunities to hear stories and to study the scientific evidence on that. Hopefully, that will lead to some government policy that recognizes the really important role that agriculture can play as one of our greatest weapons against climate change.

I'm not sure where this committee's going to go with the amendment versus Mr. Barlow's original motion, but all in all I think it's a worthwhile subject for us to be studying. I'll just limit my comments to that.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

Can we just suspend for a minute so I can have a look at the amendment, just to make sure—

Mr. John Barlow: Before you do that, Mr. Chair, if it's okay... I appreciate what the department is doing with that amendment, but that's not an amendment. That is a whole different motion. An

amendment is some tweaks here and there or some additions. That's a whole other motion.

No offence, Kody, but I would not be able to accept that as a friendly amendment. Unless there are some minor additions or subtractions to the motion I have tabled, that is an entirely different motion, in my opinion. I would suggest that if Kody wants to table that as his motion, he is more than welcome to do so. That is more than just an amendment.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kody Blois: Mr. Chair, I believe it's close. I'm wondering if we could go in camera and I can have the opportunity.... I do have some other language here that might be more along the lines of what Mr. Barlow believes would be more suitable for an amendment. I don't know who determines what is suitable and what isn't—whether it's the clerk or you, Mr. Chair—but I'm happy to blend those two together to make sure we're not duplicating efforts down the line.

The Chair: Okay.

I will suspend for a short period to compare the two and then make a ruling on whether we can blend the two or if they are two separate motions, as you say.

We'll suspend.

• (1550)

(Pause)

• (1600)

The Chair: We're back in session.

We're working on the motion.

As for as the motion and the amendment, I have to say that they are separate. An amendment has to keep the main frame of the motion. You can amend words and lines, but these two are separate.

I understand there's been some work.

Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kody Blois: Mr. Chair, this being my first time on the Hill, I apologize and I appreciate the efforts of Mr. Barlow to incorporate some of the theme of where I'm coming from as part of his motion. He can speak to that.

Thank you.

The Chair: The amendment is rejected, so do you have another amendment? I don't know how you want to proceed.

Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow: I think we have come to a mash of the two motions into one that I think we can all support. My scribbling isn't great. I can write it out better, but I will read off what Kody and I have come together on, if that works for everyone.

The Chair: You can amend your motion, so it probably would have to be an amendment.

Or you could withdraw your original motion and propose this one. That would be the other option.

Mr. John Barlow: That's probably faster.

Okay, I'll withdraw my initial motion.

The Chair: It has to be with the unanimous consent of the committee.

Do we have unanimous consent for Mr. Barlow to withdraw?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion withdrawn)

Mr. John Barlow: Good team.

I will now table a second motion. I will read that as best as I can and give it to the clerk afterwards: "That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, recognizing that in order for the government to meet its Paris Climate Accord and investments in rural communities, and given the current fuel charge exemption under the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Act does not include all fuels used on farms, the committee undertake a comprehensive study of the cumulative impact of the carbon tax on farming operations in Canada. Therefore, the committee shall study ways to reduce energy costs and adopt new technology on farms and rural communities; that the study consist of at least eight meetings so the committee at a minimum hear from the Minister of Agriculture, department officials, producers, farm groups, commodity groups, provincial agriculture ministers and the Parliamentary Budget Officer; that the committee report its findings, including its recommendations, to the House; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report."

Basically, we've taken out the agriculture minister's comments, and inserted "to meet our Paris climate accord targets" and "investments in rural communities". We've taken out a bit about the assessment of current agricultural practices and traded that with "Therefore, the committee shall study ways to reduce energy costs and adopt new technology on farms and rural communities". It again gets that carbon capture, storage, carbon credits and that type of thing.

• (1605)

The Chair: Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kody Blois: I just want to make sure—and, John, correct me if I'm wrong—that we have the words, if you're willing, "Therefore, the committee shall study ways in which the Government of Canada can partner, support and/or invest directly on farms to help farmers and producers reduce energy costs and adopt new technologies".

Can we just have the words "partner, support and/or invest directly on farms". I think "invest directly on farms" is important. I thought we had agreed—

Mr. John Barlow: If the government is willing to commit to investing directly in farms....

Mr. Kody Blois: It's to study, "study the ways".

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kody Blois: You should support that.

The Chair: He'll check with the Minister of Finance after this meeting.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Barlow: The parliamentary secretary is having a nervous breakdown, but sure, I'm totally fine with that.

The Chair: Does it have to be an amendment, or can it still come from his original motion?

Mr. John Barlow: I am fine with that friendly amendment from Kody.

Kody, what do we have just before "report"? Can you read your amendment to me again?

Mr. Kody Blois: I'll just read the first part. It would be "pursuant to Standing Order 108(2)...recognizing that in order for the Government of Canada to meet its Paris Climate Accord, investments in rural communities, particularly the agricultural sector, will be key"—I think that was fine.

Then, John, your part comes in. Where you had a period, we have added, "Therefore the committee shall study ways in which the Government of Canada can partner, support and/or invest directly on farms to help farmers and producers reduce energy costs and adopt new technologies to reduce GHG emissions."

That's what I have. If you're not okay with "GHG emissions", that's okay.

Mr. John Barlow: No, it's in there. I'll rewrite it nicely and give it to you after, if that's okay.

The Chair: You have all heard the motion. We will write it up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron, would you like to ask a question?

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Yes. As I understand it, you have removed the following part:

that the study include an assessment of current agricultural practices and innovation already in place to improve conservation, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve management of the carbon cycle;

Things are happening fast. I am sorry to slow you down, but I'd like to know if that has been removed.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have effectively removed that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Do we really want to remove that?

I, for one, think it would be worthwhile.

[English]

Mr. John Barlow: No, we will keep that in.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: All right.

[English]

Mr. Kody Blois: It's in.

Mr. Yves Perron: It's in. Okay.

Mr. John Barlow: That's my fault.

It's still in.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: It is kept in the motion.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Yves Perron: I don't know if this is the right time, but I would like to propose an amendment to that.

After “greenhouse gas emissions and improve the management of the carbon cycle”, I propose that we add “as well as other industry efforts to reduce environmental impact, such as reducing the use of plastics and alternative growing methods”.

I think it would be interesting to hear from the industry about the efforts they are making right now. That could guide us in terms of investment, and where we should be going in this regard.

The Chair: That would be right after the words “the carbon cycle”?

Is that correct, Mr. Perron?

• (1610)

Mr. Yves Perron: Yes. I think it's included in the previous sentence, in a general way, but I wanted to make that clear.

The Chair: All right. So we have an amendment on the table.

[English]

Are there any further comments?

Mr. John Barlow: Can he read his amendment again?

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Perron, you suggest that we add “such as reducing the use of plastics....”?

Mr. Yves Perron: I move that we add this “as well as other industry efforts to reduce environmental impact, such as reducing the use of plastics and alternative growing methods”.

Basically, they are examples.

The Chair: “...and alternative growing methods”.

[English]

That's the line you want to add in there. That's the amendment.

Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate my colleague's suggestion, but I think adding plastic use.... That's a different study. We really want to focus this on

greenhouse gas emissions and their carbon footprint. That is the focus of this study. If we want to do another one on plastic use in agriculture or something like that, we can certainly do that. I would be interested in doing something along that line, but I really don't want to make this too broad. I want to try to keep this focused on GHG emissions.

The Chair: Are there any further comments on the amendment?

Mr. Perron.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Far be it from me to deflect the subject of the study, but it's important to know, for example, that the thin plastic used to package some fruits and vegetables can extend their shelf life long enough to be consumed rather than wasted, which ultimately has an effect on greenhouse gases.

The committee may decide to make it a subject of study. I might even consider making it a motion. There's still a direct link. It is not unrelated to the subject.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kody Blois: I certainly appreciate my colleague's concern on this issue. However, when I look at Mr. Barlow's original motion and then certainly the second one that's been put forth, it's very focused on farm operations on site, and some of what Mr. Perron is speaking about is more on the retail side and perhaps moving forward.

I would agree with Mr. Barlow's sense that it's a little bit broad. We only have eight meetings, and that would be covering a lot of ground on top of the additions that we've already included. I would encourage Mr. Perron to bring it forward at another time perhaps.

The Chair: Okay, are there any other comments on the amendment?

[Translation]

We will vote on the amendment.

Mr. Yves Perron: I withdraw it.

The Chair: All right.

Are there any further comments on the motion?

[English]

(Motion agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

I would like to take this opportunity to move my motion, which I believe I got in first as a notice of motion. I have some copies here in both languages. If we can distribute it around, I'm going to read it into the record:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food conduct a comprehensive study into the Business Risk Management (BRM) suite of programs to ensure that they are adequately meeting the challenges of farming in the 21st century; that this study include hearing from witnesses with specific knowledge of how the BRM suite of programs are or are not currently meeting the needs of farmers; that no fewer than three meetings be held to hear from witnesses; and that the committee report its findings with recommendations back to the House of Commons.

I have been meeting with a number of agricultural stakeholders this year, and no fewer than six of them have raised concerns with the business risk management programs. Particularly, AgriStability seems to be a big one.

I know that this committee included some recommendations in a 2017 report that singled out the BRM programs for review. Given the challenges we face, notably from climate change, from uncertainty in international trade markets, I believe that this committee can work alongside the executive branch, hear from witnesses and present some comprehensive recommendations for how the programs could be amended.

The minister did meet with her territorial and provincial counterparts in December, but I see no reason that this body can't undertake this work, especially when I think all of us have been hearing a lot of feedback that these programs really need a review.

I'll end by saying that I would accept an amendment to my motion to include that we ask for a government response.

• (1615)

The Chair: Do we ask for a government response?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Yes, someone could move an amendment to my motion asking that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, we request a government response.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Mr. Yves Perron: I am going to humour Mr. MacGregor and move an amendment to ask Parliament to respond to his motion under Standing Order 109.

At the same time, I want to say that I support this motion. Business risk management programs are complex and do not always meet our farmers' needs. In fact, it is one of the priorities of the Union des producteurs agricoles to review these programs in depth. This is a great opportunity and we are in the best position to do it. I therefore support the motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Are there any other comments?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): My amendment is not very long, it is four or five words. I hope that my colleague will accept it.

[*English*]

The amendment I would like to bring forward is.... We're already amending Standing Order 108(2) to 109, I believe.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: No. Sorry, we're adding Standing Order 109 at the end: that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, we ask for a government response.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay.

After “the Business Risk Management (BRM) suite of programs”, we would like to add—we like to be precise; it might be my French—“to do a gap analysis, identify improvements, to better meet challenges of farming in the 21st century”.

The amendment would add, after “programs”, “to do a gap analysis, identify improvements”, and then we'd go back to “to better meet challenges of farming in the 21st century”.

We like to be precise.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, let me see, “to better meet the challenges”.... It's different wording.

Could you repeat the wording, just to make sure we have it, Monsieur Drouin?

Mr. Francis Drouin: I quote: “to do a gap analysis, identify improvements”.

The Chair: Do we then go back to the original wording from there?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Would you like me to say it in French too?

The Chair: No, I think that it's fine.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Soroka.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Here's my question. We're just reviewing the current programs. Is there a potential, if we see a severe default, that we can actually look at creating a new program or suggesting a new program? Or is that too much?

I'm just saying. You're the one being precise, so that's why I'm asking.

The Chair: Okay. We'll go to Mr. MacGregor now.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I just want to be clear. Mr. Drouin's amendment is going right between the words “programs” and “to”. I think I read that right.

With regard to Mr. Soroka's question, I think the committee's recommendations will be very much guided by what the witnesses say, so I see no reason for us to include such a recommendation if it's based on what we hear from our witnesses.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kody Blois: I just want to put on the record that in Kings—Hants the BRM programs are very important, and I appreciate that my colleague opposite is bringing this forward. I know that this is an important topic, and I'll certainly be supporting it moving forward. I just wanted to put that on the record.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blois.

Monsieur Perron.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: There's a difference between this proposal and the first one. The first one we adopted earlier specified a minimum number of meetings, whereas this one does not. I just want to make sure that we're going to provide for the number of meetings necessary. I think it's a very complex issue that may well take us a long time to analyze, and it shouldn't be partially analyzed. We need to do a proper review of the issue and make sound recommendations.

So should it be written down, or do we assume the committee will take the time? That's my question.

The Chair: As indicated, there will be a minimum of three meetings.

Mr. Yves Perron: That doesn't seem like a lot to me.

The Chair: We can have more, but we want at least three meetings.

[*English*]

Are there any other comments?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: I move the amendment suggested by Mr. Drouin, which would set the number of meetings at six rather than three.

The Chair: For now, we have to vote on the amendment before us. Then you can move another amendment. It's at your discretion.

Mr. Yves Perron: There are already two amendments.

The Chair: We vote on one amendment at a time.

Mr. Yves Perron: Is Standing Order 109 at the end of this one as well?

The Chair: I believe that's part of the original motion.

Mr. Yves Perron: No.

[*English*]

The Chair: You added Standing Order 109 in your original. Is that right?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Taking the clerk's advice that I can't amend my own motion, the way I'm following now is that Monsieur Perron proposed the amendment to add the government response at the end. That's one amendment. Mr. Drouin had the second amendment, which was to insert that wording closer to the top. Then, I believe, we had a third amendment, which was to move it to six meetings.

Maybe we need to vote on them in order—one, two and then three. I'm just being the traffic cop here on these amendments.

The Chair: I thought it was within the first one, but you are right. We need an amendment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron is therefore moving an amendment to include Standing Order 109 in the original motion.

[*English*]

Are there any questions? Are we in favour of adding Standing Order 109 to the original motion?

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

The Chair: Okay.

Then we have the second amendment, moved by Francis Drouin, which reads, “to do a gap analysis, identify improvements” and then continuing on with the lines.

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Is that the second one?

The Chair: Yes, that's the second one, the one that Francis moved.

Ms. Lianne Rood: Okay. We're good with that.

The Chair: Does everyone agree?

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

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron, do you have another amendment?

Mr. Yves Perron: I said at least six meetings.

The Chair: You are saying at least six meetings.

[*English*]

We have another amendment on the floor, that we do at least six meetings.

Go ahead, Mr. Soroka.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: I guess my question is this. By doing the minimum of six, what happens if we don't have enough witnesses at the time? That's why I'm fine with leaving it at three. If we need more, then we just extend it. Leaving it at a minimum of six is what I'm concerned about. A lot of times what happens is that people end up making stuff up just to fill in the time. Why waste our time if there is no reason?

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kody Blois: I am not as familiar with the procedure in committees, but let's say we only need five meetings. Does the committee not have the ability to say, as a majority, that because of the realities we'll only do five? Perhaps that's a question for the clerk.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

• (1625)

Mr. Yves Perron: This is a really big question. My concern is that we are processing it too quickly. We said there will be three meetings, there will be consent, and boom, it will be over in five minutes. We won't have understood what happened and it will be over before we've had a chance to go around.

Will the committee members assure me that, if we need six or eight meetings, we will increase their number? We can vote to have six meetings, but it could go the other way if we finish the job after five meetings. For example, earlier we voted to have eight meetings, but the committee could decide that it's over after seven.

I think six meetings would be a reasonable amount of time to study the subject, but I am not going to go to the barricades to get this adopted.

The Chair: We will vote on the amendment.

[English]

Do we need the six meetings?

(Amendment agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Before we move along, I forgot to mention—I apologize—that we have with us Joanne Markle LaMontagne, who works with the library. She is learning the whole mechanism of this committee and the process.

We are really happy to have you here, Madame LaMontagne. I just wanted to introduce you to the committee. Thanks for being here. You can maybe write a report on what you see. It might not be to your advantage; I don't know.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: As well, members, a calendar has been distributed to you. For the new people here, this is how we see what's coming up. It's a tool we use to determine how many meetings we're going to have and on what dates, and which motion we will do first.

[Translation]

Mr. Perron, the floor is yours.

Mr. Yves Perron: I had also sent a notice of motion and I wanted to table it. Is there still time to do that?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Yves Perron: You all received a document that contained several. This is the first one, and it deals with temporary foreign workers. I can read it and start talking about it while the hard copy is circulating.

Before we continue, I have a technical question, Mr. Chair. I did not prepare copies, but when I saw that everyone was giving out copies, I sent my assistant to make some, in a bit of a panic. When you present a notice of motion, do you always have to bring a paper copy or could I have presented it verbally?

The Chair: It's not necessary, but it's better, and in both official languages, if possible.

Mr. Yves Perron: All right.

I will read my motion.

That the Committee undertake a study of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program for agricultural and agri-food workers, identifying the irritants and administrative constraints, and make recommendations on updating the program to make it more flexible; that the Committee report its recommendations to the House and that it ask the government to table a response in accordance with Standing Order 109.

The Chair: You heard the motion.

Are there any questions or comments?

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It's not necessarily that we disagree.

You did distribute the schedule.

[English]

I'm just looking at times. We have supplementary estimates (B) coming, and then we have main estimates in May. We have 18 meetings left before June.

[Translation]

I would ask Mr. Perron when he wants to do the study exactly.

Would the study be done before June, or would it be done when we come back, in September or October?

Mr. Yves Perron: Members around the table surely understand my concern to carefully study the issues. This isn't a national emergency. If we get there before June, so be it, and if not, so be it.

There will be 18 meetings between now and June. I calculate that we have planned 14 meetings, so that leaves four.

Mr. Francis Drouin: There are the estimates as well.

Mr. Yves Perron: I have a question as to how this works. Would it be better if I save my motion for later or table it now and we deal with it when the time comes, even if it's after June?

The Chair: No problem. You can table your motion. It will be there and it will be ready to go. Based on the schedule, the committee will decide when to consider it. There's no problem tabling the motion if you wish to.

Mr. Yves Perron: All right. These are technical details.

The Chair: We will need to decide when.

• (1630)

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: This is an issue that we've certainly heard a lot about over the last couple of years of this committee. I think you would get a lot of witnesses coming forward to talk about this, so I would propose an amendment.

Right after the semi-colon, in front of "that the committee", I would like to insert the words "that no fewer than six meetings be held to hear from witnesses".

Then after it, you would put "and" because then it would be another....

The Chair: Okay, we have an amendment to the motion where after the words "that the committee" we add "holds no fewer than six meetings and reports its recommendations to the House".

(Amendment negatived)

We go back to the original motion that we do a study on temporary foreign workers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Mr. Yves Perron: On the two previous motions, we said earlier that we would take the time needed. I would hope that the members around the table would take the time needed to study this fundamental issue as well.

Actually, I don't understand why the amendment was defeated. I just wanted to make the comment. It's important, but we can make decisions as we go. It's important to deal with the issues fully.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'd like to give Mr. Perron a piece of advice.

The last few times we had studies like this, we accepted a lot of motions. The danger is that your motion could be put on hold for several months, because other issues could come before the committee or be in the news and you could propose another motion.

I suggest you do not put it to a vote right now, but it's your choice, obviously. However, we have two studies on the agenda. If there's a crisis, I can assure you that all we're going to do in this committee is respond to that crisis, because we are going to make sure our farmers are heard. It has happened in the past.

We can accept it today, but in the last Parliament, we had motions that were accepted but not even considered by the committee due to time constraints.

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask a technical question. There are a few of us new members around the table and we are learning how this works.

If ever that happens, can I formulate the motion differently and move it again at a later date? If so, would it be better to keep it? Thank you, by the way. It's good that we're explaining things to each other. In any case, I appreciate things being explained to me.

Ideally, I would like to put it through, so I will table it, even if I have to table it again later.

[*English*]

The Chair: There are options here.

[*Translation*]

If Mr. Perron agrees, we can vote to adjourn the debate without voting on the motion. Otherwise, we can vote on the motion and put it on hold.

Mr. Yves Perron: If we vote and we put it on hold, can I bring it back later?

The Chair: Yes, because the committee will have adopted it. We can put it on the agenda.

Mr. Yves Perron: All right.

Rest assured, Mr. Drouin, this is the only motion I'm going to ask you to vote on today.

The Chair: So that's the way you want to do it.

• (1635)

Mr. Yves Perron: Yes, absolutely. Do you want an explanation, or is that clear enough?

[*English*]

Ms. Lianne Rood: Are you withdrawing it?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: No. I'm just asking if you want me to explain the motion and why it should be supported.

The Chair: You can take the time to do it.

Mr. Yves Perron: If you're at the table of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, it's because you're in contact with agricultural producers and agri-food people. So you know that there are huge needs. Some crazy things are going on right now. For example, there is a foreign worker who has been coming here for 17 years in a row and has to go through the whole process all over again. Some producers have to provide market research every year, regardless of the sector.

I'm sure that together we can find solutions by listening to the witnesses. In fact, they will provide us with possible solutions to speed up the process and make life easier for everyone by reducing paperwork. This will lead to greater efficiency, particularly with respect to work sharing. At present, it is extremely difficult, if not virtually impossible, for producers to enter into work-sharing agreements because the time frames are too long.

In case of flooding, for example, you can't work in the fields. Suppose it lasts three weeks. During that time, the workers do nothing, and their employer cannot send them to a neighbour who needs the labour. They have to fill out forms, which take six weeks to process. These three weeks are therefore lost for both the neighbouring producer and the temporary foreign workers.

There are all sorts of similar examples. I'm going to stop here, but it's a major irritant for our farm businesses. So I encourage you to vote for the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perron.

Are there any other comments? If not, we will proceed to the vote.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): I just want to ask a question for our information. I'm told that there was a similar study done in 2017, so I'd like to see the recommendations that were made at that time. I'm not the type of person who likes to do studies just for the sake of doing them.

If there are any recommendations from the committee's 2017 study, I would like us to look at them to see what we can do with them. We could bring them back to the table. I'm not sure it would be very effective to do a study and come up with the same recommendations.

It's not because I disagree with Mr. Perron, but it's a really important issue. We should not duplicate the work that has been done. I imagine that in the space of a year and a half or two years, there would not be much difference between the two studies. So I'd like to look at those recommendations.

The Chair: That's the question I was asking the clerk, who did some checking. It seems that our committee has not done such a study.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Did the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food not make recommendations?

The Chair: I am told that the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities may have done a similar study. It is worth consulting it. I agree with you.

Mr. Yves Perron: If it turns out that this committee has done such a study, we could look into that first. That could be the first step in our study. It might even speed it up.

The Chair: I didn't understand.

Mr. Yves Perron: The first step would be to read this study, which will speed up the process. You'll all be happy because it would take less than six sessions. However, the work has to be done and recommendations have to be made, because this file has not moved.

The Chair: Mr. Blois, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Kody Blois: Given the fact that this has already been studied at HUMA, I think we should all have the chance to see the recommendations, because that could change the language. I haven't had the chance to read them, and it seems, perhaps, that some of my Conservative colleagues were referencing them.

I agree with Mr. Perron. This is an issue that's relevant in Kings—Hants, my riding, as well, but it might change how I propose an amendment, depending on what I've read from the HUMA committee.

Can we all agree? I guess it's Mr. Perron's decision to agree, but let's go back and take a look at that. Let's see what the findings and the conclusions were. That could inform a motion that we put forward.

That's what my preference would be, if Mr. Perron agrees.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Perron, I leave it to your discretion to do one of the proposed things. As I said earlier, we are not rejecting your motion, but it gives us the chance to adjourn the debate and resume it later. Nevertheless, it is your right to ask for a vote.

Mr. Yves Perron: It's not that I don't want to, but is that part of the study? I have no problem with that, if there have been studies elsewhere. Of course, we're all intelligent people who want to be effective, and we're going to look at it. I do not see a contradiction. If I feel that the committee will defeat my motion, I will suspend the vote. My intuition is good.

• (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Lehoux, it's your turn.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Perron, colleagues and Mr. Chair, I agree that we should examine the recommendations. I will be the first, Mr. Perron, to rally to your position if I am not satisfied with them. I have not read the recommendations and I cannot say whether they are relevant or not. They could possibly, as Mr. Blois said, cause us to amend the motion.

Mr. Yves Perron: Maybe I'm the one who doesn't understand the mechanism. If we suspend the vote and each of us reads the other report, we will still have to pass a motion to deal with it. That is why I do not understand why we are voting. Can someone explain to me what the difference is between voting now and voting later?

The Chair: The motion does not say that we are going to look at the other study.

Mr. Yves Perron: In that case, let's suspend the vote.

How did you say it, earlier?

The Chair: We are suspending the debate, and we can resume it at any time.

Mr. Yves Perron: Let us suspend debate, but let us look at the report.

The Chair: Does everyone agree to suspend the debate?

Mr. Yves Perron: Can we get the report from the human resources committee?

The Chair: It's online.

Mr. Yves Perron: All right.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are we all in agreement to suspend? Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lehoux, we're listening.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: What is important is that we read the study. I do not want to come back to this in six months. If we find something interesting in the study, or if it does not hold up or we cannot take anything from it, we can put the file back on the agenda sooner. No one doubts that the labour issue as it relates to immigration is important in all regions.

The Chair: We can do it anytime. The notice of motion has already been given.

[*English*]

Will somebody move that we adjourn debate?

Ms. Lianne Rood: I do.

The Chair: We have consensus to adjourn debate.

[Translation]

Is there anything else?

[English]

Do we want to look at the calendar and try to set that? There are a lot of things that are going to happen, including the supplementary estimates and the drafting of the report.

Ms. Rood.

Ms. Lianne Rood: If we have the supplementary estimates coming up, we'd like to request the minister to appear before the committee to discuss them, please.

The Chair: Monsieur Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I have great news for Ms. Rood.

Ms. Lianne Rood: Awesome.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We should formally request her presence, but I'm told on good authority that March 12, the first week after we come back, would be the day the minister could appear for supplementary estimates (B).

Ms. Lianne Rood: Thank you.

The Chair: Looking at the calendar, we have the meeting on Thursday, but we have nothing in there. We need to decide which study we're going to do.

We voted on two motions here and we accepted them. We need to decide which one is going to go first, and we need to give some instruction as to the witnesses we're going to have here. That needs to be our next order of business.

Go ahead.

Ms. Lianne Rood: I'd like to move a motion that we undertake the study proposed in a motion by John Barlow as our first order of business.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Monsieur Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We're fine with that.

The only comment I'll make about Mr. MacGregor's motion is that it would be helpful for the government, and provincial ministers as well, to know our recommendations before the July 1 meeting. Hence, it would be good for you, Mr. Chair, to present your report to the House at some point in June, just so the minister is informed of our recommendations for that FPT meeting that will be held in July. Around July, normally, they all meet for BRMs.

We're fine with starting this. I think we should allow some flexibility as well, for the clerk to know. Witnesses can't always be there when we want them.

We can start with the first meeting with regard to the—

• (1645)

The Chair: I'm not sure I heard right. Is there a meeting in April?

Mr. Francis Drouin: There is a meeting in April. July is when they have the yearly meeting normally.

The Chair: Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kody Blois: In the spirit of exactly what my colleague talked about with the agriculture minister, trying to work with the provinces and the territories on BRM.... I know that this side of the House thinks that's important. I'd like to put a motion forward that we start with Mr. MacGregor's proposal for BRM. Both are very important. If there is a way....

I don't know precedent on this committee, whether you do one study at a time or whether there can be a little crossover. I think BRM is the most important, and we should be starting with that.

The Chair: We have to vote on the motion before we can move a second motion.

Are there any other comments on Ms. Rood's motion?

Ms. Rood, go ahead.

Ms. Lianne Rood: I think we have 18 meetings between now and the end of the session, and we have asked for eight meetings on this. That's maybe six meetings with the estimates and such in between. I think there's sufficient time to carry out everything.

The Chair: Okay, eight meetings. We'll include a couple of meetings at least for the drafting of the report, draft one and draft two.

Ms. Lianne Rood: Right.

There may be meetings for which we can't get witnesses on one study, so perhaps we could start concurrently on something else in the spirit of trying to get everything done before the end of the session. We're saying up to eight meetings. Perhaps we don't need eight meetings. It's the same with the other motion.

In the spirit of working together, we can begin with this study and continue. I think we have more than enough meetings to be able to get both reports done in time for your FPT meetings in July.

Go ahead. I know what you're going to say. I was just going to lead into that.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead.

Ms. Lianne Rood: I was just going to say that, in the spirit of the private member's bill that we have before the House right now on this exact topic—that's why I think Mr. Lawrence is here today—I think that would tie in nicely. We can be doing the study at the same time this bill is before the House.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Thank you for that.

The other thing is that the carbon tax is now not without its timeline as well. With the recent Alberta Court of Appeal decision, that will be going to the Supreme Court. So the carbon tax could be struck down. That is a real possibility. Having those numbers early might be more important than having the farm subsidy programs known at that point.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other comments on the motion by Ms. Rood?

Monsieur Perron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: I hear the views of both parties and I am a little divided. I would tend to be in favour of Mr. MacGregor's motion because it is a priority that has been identified by the agricultural community.

As just mentioned, we have enough time to deal with both motions by the end. So I would tend to agree with Mr. Blois on this.

The Chair: It is also always possible to start a study and do both, if witnesses are not available. We can start the other study as well.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Blois.

Mr. Kody Blois: To Mr. Lawrence's point on the Supreme Court case that will be moving forward on the price on pollution—the carbon tax, if you will—some of the evidence that certainly could be solicited from the witnesses on this committee could also be solicited as part of that application process going forward to the court. I don't see them as absolutely necessary. Some of the testimony from witnesses and individuals can come from outside of this committee and could still be heard in the Supreme Court, I think, in a couple months' time.

I do take your point. I appreciate it. Again, to Mr. Perron's point, I believe we should start with the BRM and certainly move forward on the second piece, on Mr. Barlow's motion.

The Chair: Are there any further comments on the motion to start with the study proposed by Mr. Barlow?

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: It's defeated, so we're right back to square one. We have nothing on the calendar.

• (1650)

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): I'll move that we go with Mr. MacGregor's motion.

The Chair: Okay. It has been moved by Mr. Ellis that we go ahead immediately with Mr. MacGregor's motion.

Are there any comments?

Yes, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I mean, I'm looking forward to what the Conservatives have proposed, but we've had a decision on that matter. I think that getting something concrete and solid before the ministers.... I know how long committee meetings can drag out when we're in committee business and we're trying to get that report drafted. We've had experience in the past. I appreciate the motion's being moved, and I'll be in support.

The Chair: Okay.

Are there any further comments on the motion?

Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I tend to lend a hand to the other side as well, and I would leave that discretion to the chair and the clerk,

but if for some reason you can't get witnesses to appear on a particular date specifically for BRM, after we've agreed on the witness lists, then obviously we don't want to waste committee time, so we can try to fill it.

I'm just checking to see how you want us to proceed. Should we still submit the witness lists for both studies? Again, it's just maximizing our committee time.

The Chair: I believe that we would have to move Ms. Rood's motion, also, to be able to suggest witnesses. I stand to be corrected by the experts, but I believe we would have to have the motion.

Oh, okay, we've adopted the motion, so then we could entertain witnesses for that. The earlier we can get witness suggestions, the better it is. We could definitely do that.

Are there any other comments on the motion by Mr. Ellis to start the study on Mr. MacGregor's motion?

Yes, Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Could we, as Francis has said, put in that motion...just the discretion, as the honourable member talked about, to call other witnesses with respect to the GHG motion as well? Is that fair?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Priority one is BRM. Priority two is...the two motions we adopted. Normally we would leave that discretion to the chair for witnesses.

The Chair: Mr. Philip Lawrence, did you want to make an amendment to the motion?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's fine. I trust your discretion, Chair.

The Chair: Are we all in favour of the priority, the first study being the study proposed by Mr. MacGregor?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Okay. We will start with that study. The other one has been approved, also. We will not waste any time.

At this time, we need to get some witness names in, for the clerk to be able to call them. It's up to you, but usually we start with government officials. They're right here in Ottawa most of the time, so we can quickly get them in for Thursday's meeting. It's up to you if you have other witnesses you'd like to see here. I'll take some direction.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Perhaps, Mr. Chair, we could have the department appear on Thursday. Again, for some of us who are new, it's good to have a briefing. I'm sure they're going to have plenty to say on BRMs. It would probably be a good start, especially with a short notice for Thursday.

The Chair: Do you want the full two hours for government officials?

Mr. Francis Drouin: We can probably ask.... It's for the questions that we ask. It's mostly us, not necessarily the officials. There are statements, and then the amount of time that we have to ask questions is not a lot. Just keep that in mind. So, two hours would be good.

The Chair: Is that okay?

Do you want the full two hours, Monsieur Perron?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: I would tend to agree. It would also allow us to give more reasonable notice to witnesses for the following week.

The Chair: Fine.

Are there any other comments?

[*English*]

Mr. Kody Blois: We had representatives from the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture on the Hill this week. We talked about BRM specifically. Those individuals were scheduled to go home Thursday morning. I promised them that I would bring up the opportunity of whether or not they could come to speak to the BRM program. They certainly would have great insight to provide.

I put that to the committee. I know that usually it's perhaps the subcommittee or the liaisons who talk. But I would love to be able to see them while they're here, so we wouldn't have to fly them up from Nova Scotia—it saves costs—to just ask them to perhaps reschedule flights or leave Thursday evening. If they could be here, we could try to make that happen.

I'm looking to you, but maybe that's something we can do offline.

• (1655)

The Chair: It's up to the committee if you want to afford the federation some time as they are here. Would that be acceptable to the committee?

Would they be here for the afternoon, or do you want to try to...?

Mr. Kody Blois: Assuming we have room for these representatives of the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, I would connect with them today and say that we have room for them on Thursday if they would reschedule their flight.

Ultimately, I would probably try to find a witness on the BRM program in the next six meetings that we're going to study this. Let's save a couple of thousand bucks. They're already here. We can just get them to reschedule their flights, perhaps, if we have a window on Thursday.

I don't know if we require extra time. Of those witnesses we plan to call, there are some from my province who are traditionally harder to get to Ottawa. We could have them if I know ahead of time.

The Chair: You can maybe communicate back to us to make sure they can reschedule their flights.

Mr. Kody Blois: What I'll do is connect them, perhaps, to the clerk. Assuming we can get them on the schedule, we can see what's possible on their schedules.

I just see it as a good opportunity, given the fact that they're already here in Ottawa.

The Chair: Ms. Rood, go ahead.

Ms. Lianne Rood: I think that's a great idea since they're already in town. I'm all about saving money. But what I would propose is that we do the officials for the first hour, have the federation come for the second hour, and then defer officials for another hour maybe at the end of the study, after we've heard from other witnesses. We can hear from them again if we have other questions before we finish the study.

Mr. Kody Blois: Weren't there supposed to be two hours of government officials? Perhaps when I was talking I didn't realize.... I didn't know what our plan was prior to my raising that.

The Chair: Sometimes it's one hour, sometimes....

Would there would be two on the panel?

Mr. Kody Blois: There are three individuals. Only one needs to speak. There's the executive director from the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture, and then there are two farmers. I think one would be applicable under the BRM and one wouldn't.

I just see it as a great opportunity to get people from that end of the country here in Ottawa at low cost to the committee while they're here.

The Chair: We could split the panel, too. We could keep a couple of officials there, and the farmers. Sometimes that's a good mix.

Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I just have a quick comment. It also gives us now a two-week breathing window to come up with a proper list for when we return after our constituency week next week.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Perron, did you have a question? No, I see you didn't.

Ms. Rood, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Lianne Rood: I was just going to add that if we're attending the reception tonight, there are perhaps other individuals we may come across who may be in town from another province that is further away. We could talk to them as well.

Perhaps we want to fill that second hour not just with folks from Nova Scotia. There may also be some folks around from New Brunswick or P.E.I. whom we could have here as well.

The Chair: Usually there is a maximum of four or five witnesses. We can split it, for sure. It's an option.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes, I'm all for it.

The only thing I would caution is that we make sure things are aligned. I'd say they'll have to check with their national organization. The last thing we want are dissenting views from farmers, because we have to make our recommendation based on the witnesses, so if there are dissenting views within their own farming community.... I just want to be careful about that.

The second point I want to make is that we should put priority on at least getting a briefing first, so we all understand collectively what the department has to face. I would suggest that the first hour would be departmental briefing at least. If we meet some folks later this afternoon or whatnot, we can invite them for the second hour or for 45 minutes.

The Chair: If you invite them, I think we can share the motion, just so they understand what the parameters of the motion are.

We could have the Library of Parliament write a short synopsis of the study, based on the motion. Again, the motion is basically the framework of what we want to do here, and we can inform....

As I understand, we're going to bring in the government officials for the first hour. We'll wait to hear from Mr. Blois if there are witnesses and others for the second hour. You can contact the clerk ASAP.

As for the rest of the witnesses....

Monsieur Perron.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: I'd like to make sure that we understand each other.

Are you inviting government officials on Thursday as well? Did we not discuss inviting just the witnesses who were in Ottawa on Thursday, even if it means finishing earlier, and inviting the government representatives to the next session? I wouldn't want to run out of time for the government representatives, who can explain to us what's in place now.

Is that what's being proposed? I seem to have heard that you're proposing both panels on Thursday.

The Chair: Yes, we made this suggestion because a lot of people are in town for the annual meeting of the Canadian federation. Nothing prevents us from inviting public servants again. They can always come to the committee if, halfway through....

Mr. Yves Perron: I just want to make sure we're not running out of time. The last time we talked about today's very tight deadline for sending the letter.

The Chair: That is not normal.

Mr. Yves Perron: It may not have seemed like it, but every time my time was up, I had four or five more questions to ask. If we want to go deeper, have a comprehensive understanding and make intelligent recommendations, I think we need to take the time.

The Chair: As for the letter, the deadline had not been set by us. In this case, we decide on the duration of the meetings.

Mr. Yves Perron: We will be able to invite the government representatives back and it will not be a big deal.

The Chair: Yes, we can invite them back at any time. You can get back to us on that by tomorrow.

[*English*]

You can get back to us if there are some people in town you'd like to see.

As for the witnesses for next week, it would be great if we could have them by the end of this week, which is Friday, so get on your witness list and see if you can suggest anyone.

Monsieur Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, in terms of witnesses, I know we will most likely invite some of the same folks. Can we leave it up to the discretion of the clerk? If the Liberals and the Conservatives suggest the same witness, then we invite the same witness, but if there happens to be a disagreement—which there won't be, obviously—how would we decide on witnesses? What's the step forward? How does this committee want to proceed?

Committees work differently, so I just want to make sure we....

The Chair: What we've done in the past, and what seems to be working on other committees, is that the first choice would go to the parties as represented in the committee, the official opposition, etc. If there are similar witnesses, then obviously both people would be happy, but then the next choice would fall in the same order as the composition of the committee.

That's the standard way of doing it, but it can be up to the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: It will come down to the same thing, because it is the composition of the committee that will decide that.

The Chair: Yes, this is proportional to the composition of the committee.

Make sure to list witnesses in order of preference in the list you submit.

[*English*]

Put your first choice and second choice. Rank them in that order so that our clerk knows the ones you want in first, second, or third—by Friday, if you can. Again, sometimes it takes a long time and we have to go down the list. If you have contact details—sometimes they have them, but sometimes they don't—like phone number, email and the person who represents that organization, then include those.

Is there any other discussion?

I don't know if we have anything else that we haven't covered for procedure.

I will just confirm that the letter has gone. It was sent to the trade committee, and they have it in hand. We did our jobs. Thank you so much.

• (1705)

Mr. Neil Ellis: I move that we adjourn.

The Chair: We have a motion to adjourn. Thank you, Mr. Ellis.

If there is nothing else, we shall adjourn.

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