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—
Chair

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand

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•(1540)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Roger Préfontaine): We have quorum. We can proceed with the election of a chair.

[English]

Your first item of business, pursuant to Standing Order 106(1), is to elect a chair. I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Valley.

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): I nominate Lloyd St. Amand for chair.

The Clerk: It is moved by Mr. Valley that Mr. St. Amand take the chair.

Are there any other nominations? There being no more nominations, I declare nominations closed and declare Mr. St. Amand the duly elected chair.

Mr. Martin, we've just elected Mr. St. Amand the chair of the committee.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Good idea.

The Clerk: Before inviting Mr. St. Amand to take the chair, the committee agrees that we will now proceed to the election of vice-chairs.

[Translation]

I am now ready to proceed with the election of vice-chairs.

[English]

Are there any nominations?

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): I nominate Jeremy Harrison as the first vice-chair.

The Clerk: Mr. Prentice has nominated Mr. Harrison as the first vice-chair.

Monsieur Ménard.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): I nominate Mr. Bernard Cleary as second vice-chair.

The Clerk: Mr. Ménard proposes Mr. Cleary as second vice-chair.

[English]

Are there any other nominations?

There being no further nominations, I declare nominations closed and declare Mr. Harrison and Mr. Cleary duly elected first vice-chair and second vice-chair respectively.

Mr. St. Amand, the chair is yours.

The Chair (Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.)): Firstly, I want to thank Mr. Valley for placing my name in nomination and thank all of you for the confidence you have in me. I will do my best not to let you down.

Secondly, if I may, my first exposure to the chair of a standing committee in the House of Commons was the chairmanship of Ms. Karetak-Lindell. In my view, having sat, as all of you have, in several meetings chaired by Ms. Karetak-Lindell, she has come to represent for me what I always thought a very competent chair would be—invariably fair, always courteous, always balanced. On those occasions when she saw fit to intervene, her interventions were focused, cogent, and always respectful. So I think I speak on behalf of all of the members of the committee in saying to Ms. Karetak-Lindell how truly grateful we are for the many months and the unfailing courtesy with which she treated every one of us and also the witnesses.

Thank you very much, Ms. Karetak-Lindell.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Mr. Cullen.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, on a point of order, congratulations to you and the vice-chairs, and without trying to interrupt any of your proceedings, I wonder if, with your permission, I could table some correspondence from the Deputy Prime Minister and some material from the RCMP in response to the Inuit dogsleds issue. This is sort of an interim update for the committee, and with your permission I'd like to table it in both official languages.

•(1545)

The Chair: Mr. Cullen, I was alerted to this possibility a few minutes before our meeting convened. I understand that the report has yet to be filed in the House of Commons. Am I correct on that?

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Chairman, we don't characterize this really as a report, and we don't see it as being a report that needs to go first to the House of Commons. We see it as some correspondence from the Deputy Prime Minister and an update from the RCMP.

What the RCMP is saying is that they've made some huge progress. They're interviewed some 40 persons and analyzed some 2,000 pages, but they are requesting some additional time, and that is what is being put forward to the committee.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen, firstly, thank you for that clarification. I thought it was perhaps in the guise of a report, but clearly it's not. Rather, it's correspondence.

Mr. Cleary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Cleary (Louis-Saint-Laurent, BQ): Finish what you have to say.

[*English*]

The Chair: Unless there is some objection from any of the members gathered, I have no difficulty—and I don't think we have any difficulty—with your filing the correspondence.

Am I correct on that or incorrect on that?

Mr. Cleary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Cleary: I have an objection, but I don't quite know how to frame it. First, our committee never asked for a report from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The minister is the one who decided to confer the mandate upon the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, when in fact we had asked that an impartial judge be appointed.

I would also like to know what this report would entail and where it will take us. This isn't what was decided and agreed upon here. Should we accept this, it will be tantamount to saying that we are in agreement with it. And I for one do not agree.

We have debated this issue at length and we have demanded what we thought it appropriate to demand. No one was concerned with our opinion, and it was simply decided that things would work this way. Nobody came and made suggestions before the committee, these things were imposed on us. And that is not what I expected.

I'll wait for other members to make their opinions known, but this certainly isn't what I had expected. I would be far more in favour of a discussion on the matter, before we are faced with incomplete reports.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Valley, and then Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Roger Valley: Mr. Chairman, we have information that's available. It may not be what we want, but I think we should take a look at it and make a decision after the fact, after the information is tabled, after we've had time to take a look at it.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Roy Cullen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Cleary, your first point was quite legitimate: the committee did not ask for an answer. One was provided courtesy of the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and the Deputy Prime Minister

[*English*]

to keep the committee informed as to progress. That is why the Deputy Prime Minister and the RCMP wish to share that information with the committee.

The Chair: Any further comments?

Mr. Harrison.

Mr. Jeremy Harrison (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): I don't think there's a problem having the information tabled at committee, but my understanding was that the motion we'd passed was for a judge to be looking into this, not for the RCMP to be doing an internal audit or investigation or whatever this is.

That said, I think it's fine if we have this information, but it should be noted that what we asked for, and what this committee voted for, was for an impartial judge to be looking into this.

The Chair: Any other comments? If not, if it's the case, then, that we can't file it by way of unanimous consent, then perhaps I could ask for a show of hands.

All those in favour of having this correspondence filed with the committee, please raise your hands.

Those opposed.

The motion carries.

Thanks, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Jim Prentice: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, there are too many Liberals in the room. They can speak, but they can't all vote. I'm not sure it matters, but....

The Chair: The motion still passes.

The clerk has copies of the....

Mr. Cleary.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Cleary: Mr. Chairman, I would like someone to tell me in exactly what respect we have accepted this. Is this just information which has been thrust upon us?

We were just told, barely 30 seconds ago, that we would be kept informed throughout the process. We also remarked that that is not what we wanted. From what I can gather we are now prepared to be informed.

At the end of the day, I don't want someone to pick up the file and for us to turn around and say that we did our part and that's that. We didn't agree with this, and so it can't be imposed on us. I really don't think, at least on this side of the room, that people will perceive our agreement simply as one of being kept informed, as opposed to some sort of commitment on our part.

So, I'd like some clarification on this and for the chair to tell us about what sort of information we are to expect. People will have access to this information and that is all fine and dandy, as nobody has trouble reading. However, there needs to be some sort of context to the information being received.

[English]

The Chair: I think you made the point clearly, Mr. Cleary. It's not necessary for me to remake the point. I think the committee members understand this is tabled or filed under the guise of information and nothing more than that.

The clerk has just informed me that with respect to Bill C-54, witnesses would be available to present themselves before the committee on Thursday of this week. There are no witnesses available for today.

We have, as I understand it, a remaining piece of business, a motion that was circulated by Ms. Barnes.

Is there any further business?

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): When we were talking the last time, before committee, I mentioned the fact that this committee has historically operated with a 48-hour notice of motion other than for amendments to pieces of legislation. The clerk informed me just before the break that we would not go through redoing our rules again, and if I wanted that changed I had to do a notice of motion.

I'm pointing out to the members that if I need any information to help this committee...the bureaucracy is impartial. It's not like I can just pick up the phone and get information. There's a process through the minister's office, through Sarah, through somebody else who's a liaison. It's not designed to function like that. That's not our only source of information—obviously we all have research branches and everything—but sometimes it's helpful. Before we decide on motions, you may want some pieces of information offered to you, and 48 hours still isn't a huge amount of time.

It's something this committee operated on for many years, as I know from back when I chaired it. The last time Ms. Karetak-Lindell chaired it, in the last Parliament, it was 48 hours. We've tried this for a year. I'm saying that instead of... One sleep is what it came out to last year. Especially if you're not in your office when it magically appears, or your staff doesn't catch it, sometimes you're walking in the day of first hearing about it, and I think when we're doing the nation's business at the nation's taxpayers' dollars request, sometimes it would help if we had just a little more time. Our studies can get out lots more information, but I personally would ask you to consider reverting to what the committee used to follow.

The Chair: Before I call on others, I just want to make sure that everybody has had available to them a copy of the notice of motion. It was circulated.

An hon. member: It's the first I've heard of it.

•(1555)

Hon. Sue Barnes: That's my point exactly.

Mr. Pat Martin: I don't mind dealing with it now, but I don't remember seeing it. That doesn't mean it didn't come to my office.

The Chair: With respect to speakers, then, Mr. Valley first, Mr. Martin then had his hand up, and then Mr. Prentice.

Hon. Sue Barnes: Just for clarification, could the clerk let the committee know when it was circulated, because this exactly proves the point I was trying to make.

Mr. Pat Martin: How could it be circulated when the committee didn't exist yet?

Hon. Sue Barnes: It was last week.

Mr. Pat Martin: The committee wasn't struck. Well, yes, it was.

The Chair: Mr. Valley.

Mr. Roger Valley: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As a new member, I don't know how long I get to use that excuse, but for as long as I can I'll use it. We have an awful lot of information in front of us, and it doesn't seem to be a stretch to go back to what they traditionally used or what they used in the past: the 48-hour rule.

I could go to Mr. Prentice's last discussion we had before the break week. We had a long meeting; we had a meeting that covered many points. There was a lot of frustration among members. We spoke at length on the motion that was introduced and we ended up with a major amendment. I would say that probably half, if not a third to a half, was removed. The motion passed, not unanimously, but I think more time would have been a little bit easier for us. I don't see where 48 hours should be that big of a problem for us.

As has been mentioned, we're doing very important business here, and if we could have that time I think it would be appreciated. Considering the amount of correspondence we all have to deal with, I think it's not asking an awful lot.

The Chair: Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: My view is that the only reason the 48-hour rule is viewed as the normal rule is because that was the past practice during the years when the Liberals had a majority government. It works to the benefit of the ruling party. Since we're now in a minority government situation, it's far more advantageous for the opposition members to have the 24-hour rule, or in fact, as some would say, to have no notice of motion necessary at all. But we're not going that far.

I think the 24-hour rule is actually more fair, in that when your committee meets twice a week, two days apart from each other, the 48-hour rule means you have to have your notice of motion in during, essentially, the Tuesday meeting, if it's Tuesdays and Thursdays, or else you won't be able to have it debated on the Thursday, and therefore you'll be waiting until the next week. So essentially, the 48-hour rule really becomes a one-week rule for having your issue brought to the attention of the committee. With a 24-hour notice only, then even in the middle of that gap period, if you're meeting Mondays and Wednesdays, on a Tuesday you can still submit your motion and have it dealt with at the Wednesday meeting. That's why it's more fair, and that's why when the Liberals were ruling everything, under the majority government situation, they loved that 48-hour rule, because it tied the hands of the opposition members who may have had agenda items other than the ordinary business of the government.

The Chair: Mr. Prentice.

Mr. Jim Prentice: I'm not in favour of the motion. I think it's not a necessary change. I think the committee functioned reasonably well over the last year, and certainly I don't think any difficulties were related to the notice period for the motion.

And apropos Mr. Martin's comments, I think the 24-hour provision restores a little bit of balance here. I mean, the parliamentary secretary is the only one who perhaps has a little more difficulty with the 24-hour period, but she and the minister have ample staff. Mr. Cleary, for example, Mr. Martin, us.... It's important to us that this committee be responsive, and sometimes that's going to entail a 24-hour notice period. It's worked fine, and I don't see any reason in particular to change it.

The Chair: Mr. Cleary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Cleary: I think that a shorter timeframe will help us respond more quickly. That's what we are trying to do with the 24-hour rule. And when it comes to that, obviously I'm going to agree, as that was the format I favoured.

The goal here isn't to slow anything down. On the contrary, this will enable us to react more quickly to potentially urgent matters. I don't see the big problem with this, especially as far as the Liberals are concerned, as they have resources that we don't, what with all the public servants standing behind them. It might actually force them to work faster. And then? Well, I think that at some point it would be useful if there were more flexibility. Especially when it comes to urgent matters. When things are urgent, they're urgent.

So, I'm going to vote for the 24-hour rule.

• (1600)

[*English*]

The Chair: If there are no further comments, I'll call the question.

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: Just by way of announcement, so to speak, I understand that the clerk will endeavour between now and Thursday to determine whether or not another room will potentially be available for our meetings. We don't need to make a decision today; that would be superfluous, because there may not be another time slot available. But the clerk will endeavour to let us know by Thursday whether or not some other time slot could be accommodated, which might ease the travel burden of some of the Liberal members and Mr. Martin and also the Conservative members from out west.

Ms. Skelton.

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): I was flipping through this interim report that we received this afternoon, and as I go through it I see more and more that the RCMP are issuing a final report on everything. I agree totally with Mr. Cleary that this is not what the committee asked for, and I'd like to know why they have taken this initiative and gone ahead with it when this was not asked for. It concerns me.

The Chair: The difficulty, Ms. Skelton, is that Mr. Cullen had to take his leave. I'm not suggesting for a moment that your query is not a relevant one; it likely is, but in his absence, I think anybody else is disadvantaged in trying to respond to that.

If somebody on the government side wishes to proffer a response, fair enough, but I think Mr. Cullen is the proper person to be asked that. Your comments are noted, of course.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Mr. Chair, I would therefore like you, on behalf of the committee, to write him a letter and ask him why they went ahead with that, because it was not the specific recommendation of this committee—as far as I know. I think they are doing something we did not ask for, and I would like to know why they are doing it.

The Chair: I will take that under advisement for now.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Please. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Cleary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Cleary: Before finishing today, I would like to thank Ms. Karetak-Lindell for her hard work. And I do so mainly as an aboriginal but also as a member of Parliament, and as part of this committee. She had a tough job. And I think that she acquitted herself well. She has been as objective as possible, despite my discontent over certain matters. But that's all part of life in the world of politics. I'd personally like to thank her as these matters are dear to my heart. Thank you.

Some members: Bravo!

[*English*]

The Chair: If there are no further comments, we will reconvene on Thursday at 3:30, when we anticipate there will be some witnesses available with respect to Bill C-54.

The meeting is adjourned.

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