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—
Chair

The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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• (0905)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee: Welcome to the committee. I see a quorum.

In conformity with Standing Order 106(1), your first item of business is to elect a chair. I'm ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): It is my pleasure to put forth Andrew Telegdi's name for chair.

The Clerk: Are there further nominations?

I declare the nominations closed.

Mr. Temelkovski has moved that Andrew Telegdi be elected chair of the committee. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Telegdi duly elected chair.

Your next item of business, if you want to proceed, is the election of the two vice-chairs. One vice-chair is from the official opposition and the other is from another official party.

I'm looking for a nomination for vice-chair from the official opposition.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): I'd like to nominate Inky Mark, please, for one of the vice-chairs.

The Clerk: Are there any further nominations?

Mr. Jaffer has moved that Mr. Inky Mark be duly elected vice-chair opposition. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Mr. Mark, you are now the vice-chair opposition.

Now we proceed to vice-chair election from another opposition party. I am ready to accept a nomination.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): I would like to nominate Meili Faille as opposition vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

The Clerk: Are there any further nominations?

Mr. Clavet has moved that Meili Faille be nominated for the other vice-chair of the committee. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Now I invite Mr. Telegdi to take the chair.

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): We have some routine business that we can or cannot do today. I will certainly leave that to the members of the committee. First let me make a couple of comments. This committee has been quite important to me over the years, and I'd just like to reflect on the membership of this committee.

We have 39 members of the House of Commons who were not born in Canada. They come from 23 countries. In this committee, half the members weren't born in Canada. There are two refugees that I know of; one is Rahim Jaffer and the other one is me.

Another interesting thing is that on this committee we have the very first member of Parliament who is of Syrian descent, and we have Lui, who is of Macedonian descent. We also have our first Polish Canadian elected, our first Japanese Canadian elected, and of course the power couple on the Hill, Mr. and Mrs. Grewal, the first husband and wife team elected.

I think that's really quite exciting, the makeup of the committee, and it very much speaks to the interests of members on the committee. With the new structure we're going to have to collaborate to an extent we've never had to before. This is a good process, because I think we're going to come up with better pieces of legislation. We have the founding nations, with Quebec and the English, and then we have everybody else who came along as well. It really is an exciting composition for the committee. It means that many of us have memories of what it meant to go through the immigration system, or what it meant to adopt. For other people, it was their parents.

One interesting practice in the old immigration history, one that didn't apply when I came, was that a name like Bill Siksay, a Hungarian name, was changed. I guess the immigration officials found it easier to say. That happened a whole lot.

Of course, Inky can talk to us about immigration to this country as well, and about what Canadians of Chinese ancestry have suffered.

So I'm excited that in this day and age in Canada we can have this kind of composition for a committee.

I'm in your hands now for routine motions. The routine motions concern the steering committee.

The clerk has asked me if we want to proceed with business today or deal with it at the next meeting, when you all will have had notice of the information we'll be dealing with. We can do it either way. If you want, we can send it out to you before the next meeting so that you'll have the information. You could discuss it amongst yourselves and then come back.

• (0910)

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I would agree to proceed in that fashion. We have a lot of new members on the committee, and that would give them a chance to get familiar with the routine proceedings. Then we can deal with all the business at the next meeting.

The Chair: Okay.

As well, we don't have a time for the committee meetings. We'll have to stay with the status quo until we hear back from the whips. Right now, the meetings are Monday and Wednesday at 3:30. Those are the timeframes. Hopefully they'll change them, but we'll see what happens.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Maybe we could go around the room and have an introduction from everybody.

• (0915)

The Chair: That would be a great idea. Go ahead, Lui.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Okay. Never recommend anything unless you're ready to do it, right?

I was born in Macedonia. I came as a 13-year-old boy. I didn't speak a word of English. When you're a 13-year-old kid and you're thrown into a country where nobody speaks your language, you find it very odd.

I went to school—junior high, high school, college, university—and then I worked with Freedom 55 Financial for 20 years. After that, I decided to run for politics for the first time ever. There was a new riding up where I live. I decided to run for a number of reasons. One was to provide a challenge for myself. After being in the same business for 20 years, you kind of go with your eyes closed—or you don't even go and you still get paid. I've always wanted a challenge, and this was one that fit me perfectly, I would say.

One of the other reasons I ran was to give my children and other generations a role model in my community, to say, look, Lui came to Canada at 13 and didn't speak a word of English, and now he's in Parliament. If Lui can do it, why not me?

I'm married, and we have four children. When I told them I would like to do this, they said to me, "Old man, you've gone mad." They couldn't fathom how a kid who couldn't speak English a couple of years back would want to do this. I wanted to give them the idea that if you want to do something, this country still to this day provides a golden opportunity to those who want to pay the price for the gold.

That's me.

The Chair: Lui, could you just pronounce your name for the committee?

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Oh, it's "*Loo-ee Temel-kovskee*". It used to be Lubomir, but I shortened it to Lui. Nobody could pronounce the "J", much like the "Z".

My wife is of Italian background. She came to Canada when she was eight months old. We met many years ago. I undertook to study Italian, and I'm fairly fluent in it. She studied Macedonian at the University of Toronto. She is more fluent in Macedonian than I am in Italian.

As for French, I studied French up to intermediate conversational French in college. Unfortunately, it was prior to my studying Italian, so when I studied Italian, I kind of lost the French. I'm going to do my best to be fluent in French within a couple of years.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hedy Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): I have been a member of Parliament since 1993. I came to Canada in 1970. We needed physicians then. What's new? We need physicians now. I studied medicine in Dublin, Ireland, but I was born in Trinidad and Tobago, in the Caribbean, and I came here, practised medicine for 23 years, and was very involved in medical politics. I ran in 1993 and defeated Kim Campbell, who was then Prime Minister, and here I am in Parliament. I've been Minister of State for Multiculturalism and Status of Women for roughly seven years. So all of the issues we're going to be dealing with on citizenship and immigration are close to my heart in terms of integration, ethnicity, racism, language, culture, and all of those things that are really important for Canadians, when they come here, to integrate in society.

I am also currently stick-handling the file on foreign credentials, which, while not purely an immigrant file.... There are lots of Canadian-born who studied elsewhere when universities started to shut down in the 1980s and who still cannot find work in Canada. And then there all kinds of Canadians who came here eight years ago and who are no longer immigrants; they're citizens. I'm a firm believer that the day you become a citizen you are no longer an immigrant; you're a citizen. You're a first-generation citizen, but you're still a citizen. So I think immigrants are people who come into the country and have not yet achieved citizenship, because we need to start belonging the day we become citizens.

For me, these are very important issues, and I'm looking forward to working with you. It's going to be a very interesting Parliament, but I have a feeling, looking at the people across the way.... I know Bill very well, and obviously Rahim, and Nina Grewal from my part of the world, and Inky. I don't know the other three new people, but I know that you all care passionately about these issues. I think this is a challenge for us, as parliamentarians, to put aside partisanship as much as we can and do what we can in the best interests of Canadians. We've been there; many of us know what it feels like. I think this is a real opportunity for us to work together at finding as much common ground as we can in order to move forward.

So I'm looking forward to doing that with you.

•(0920)

The Chair: Bill.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thank you, Andrew. Let me offer my congratulations to you on being elected chair, and to Mr. Mark on being vice-chair, and *félicitations* to Meili on her election as well.

I was a constituency assistant in Svend Robinson's office for eighteen years, so my contact with immigration and citizenship issues is at the casework level, where you sit with people in their crisis of processing or refusal or whatever the circumstance is. So those folks will be in my mind as I sit here working on the committee.

It's an assignment I requested. I didn't get stuck with the job; I asked for it, so I'm very much looking forward to being here.

My riding is one in which 44% of folks are immigrants, so a lot of people in Burnaby—Douglas have firsthand experience of the immigration experience, and recent experience of it as well. So I know the work of this committee is very important to them.

Hedy mentioned that we know each other. I ran against Hedy back in 1997, and I'm somewhat relieved that I made it to the House of Commons and that Hedy is here too—a happier circumstance than it may have been otherwise.

I just want to say one other thing. I know that great strides have been made over the years around the issue of gay and lesbian immigration to Canada. As a young man I was in a relationship with an American, and as young gay men we couldn't figure out a way over the border problem. We didn't know how to continue our relationship, given the fact that the U.S.-Canada border was between us. Now, that was 25 or 30 years ago, and it was a significant problem for us. We gave up on our relationship because of that explicit issue. We didn't know how to get around that.

So I know that the problems in immigration policy have a real, direct effect on people's lives and commitments and their hope for happiness. That's another reason the work of this committee is important to me.

The Chair: Monsieur Clavet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: I would have to say that the main reason for my political involvement is immigration. I had been a journalist for 25 years when I decided to become politically involved. I had been living until very recently in Manitoba. There were problems with the welcoming process for French-speaking immigrants and I did not want to be a party to that. I did not want to be a bystander; I wanted to be involved. My political commitment is therefore to immigration, even more so because I believe that immigrants represent Quebec's future, as well as Canada's future. One way or another, immigrants are our future.

We're not making babies anymore. The birth rate is on a sharp decline. Currently, the number of deaths is greater than the number of births and this is cause for great concern. It is not, therefore, for lack of anything else but rather out of love that I feel that immigration is the solution for our future.

Around 30 or 40 years ago, a Quebec poet, Gilles Vigneaut, even said the following in one of his songs, entitled *Mon pays*—a title that has caused some confusion in both Quebec and Canada:

From my great solitary country
I shout before I am silent
To all men on this earth
My home is your home
Within my four walls of ice
I take my time and space
To make a fire, a place
For the people on the horizon
And all people are of my race

It is this kind of political commitment that made me want to work with the Committee on citizenship and immigration. I am here out of conviction as I am sure most of my colleagues are.

I'm thankful for the extraordinary opportunity I've been given to advance causes and I would add that over the years, this committee has established a solid reputation for itself in the House of Commons. I hope that we will work together in an atmosphere of collegiality, one that rises above party lines.

Thank you.

•(0925)

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): My name is Meili Faille and I am a member for the Bloc québécois. I was just recently elected and this is my first experience as a member of Parliament. In the past I worked as a civil servant and also as an assistant in a minister's office. Parliamentary routine does not scare me. The transition has been a very good, gentle one.

I am a Quebecker of Chinese origin—of Taiwanese origin, in fact. I am 32 years old—I am very young—and my mother tongue is mandarin. I also speak French and English. When I started going to school, I spoke very little French or English. I was at home, on the farm, and I went to a local school. I hope therefore to be able to contribute to how immigrants are received in regions and to perhaps finding solutions to these issues by working with this committee.

Our family was part of the first wave of Chinese people to arrive in Canada, and more specifically in Quebec. These people were ready and willing to take up the challenge of learning a language and of learning French as their first adopted language. Thirty years ago, our family established the first Chinese association with the aim of protecting our culture, passing it on to future generations, encouraging these generations to preserve their roots, and facilitating the integration of these immigrants into Quebec society.

My family has been involved in politics since the time when my grand-father was a politician with the Bloc populaire canadien. My family has always taken a great interest in human rights. In fact, the associations I have worked with on globalization issues have been very interested in the human rights perspective.

In terms of my professional background, I worked for approximately three years with the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, drafting the memorandum of understanding for the creation of that ministry. This involved all the negotiations on borders, the Solicitor General and security issues. I'm therefore very familiar with citizenship, revenue and foreign affairs issues. I also collaborated on the development of the ministry's constitution acts and so I am also somewhat familiar with procedures. I believe we will be able to shed some light on these issues when changes are proposed in this committee.

I share my colleague's sentiments on his attachment and inspiration. I was familiar with Félix Leclerc at a very young age and I'm very familiar with his words. In terms of reception and acceptance, Quebec's desire to be open to all its citizens is a real one and I am probably the proof in the pudding. I am one of the first people of the Chinese society to have succeeded in becoming a member of Parliament.

Thank you.

• (0930)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Inky.

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations on your election.

Like many of you, I wasn't born in this country. I came to Canada in 1955 as a six-year-old. I couldn't speak a word of English, but children adapt very quickly. The last place I expected to end up in was Ottawa, but that's the way life is.

Hedy brings up an interesting point, which is that immigrants really need to be looked at as citizens. Because of the nature of this country's immigration policy, I'm actually third generation by immigration. That's how I refer to myself. Again, it's because of the history of the immigration laws of this country. My kids are actually first generation, because my grandfather came to this country to work on the railroad, to build the railroad.

In terms of this committee, I've been here probably too long. Andrew and I have been here a long time, over four years, and we've seen a lot of things happen. I think the makeup of this committee is very interesting. There's no doubt we all have common interests and look forward to doing the right things for the country, beyond partisanship.

The Chair: Thank you.

Helena.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): My name is Helena Guergis. You name it, I've heard it, when it comes to the pronunciation of my name, and I'm okay with that.

I was raised in a politically active family. Since 1969, the year I was born, we've had a member of my family elected at the municipal level. Today we have one cousin who is a mayor back in my riding and another one who is a deputy mayor.

Going back to 1992, I had indicated that I would like to run in the 1994 election, and I made this very clear. When it came close to that

time, having an Assyrian and Swedish background on my father's side, and we've just recently discovered that it's Jewish on my mother's side, I was sat down and told that my male cousin would be running, that I was getting married and had other responsibilities ahead of me. So I was okay with that for a little while, until the next week, when my cousin came along and said I should open a tanning salon. Well, I did open my own business and I had my own business for six and a half years. It wasn't a tanning salon; it was a bed, bath, and kitchen gift shop. And I had worked in my father's business, which was a furniture store, for many, many years before that.

At the same time, I decided to get some political experience by working for a provincial member of Parliament, so I did constituency work for five years before closing up shop and moving to Toronto to work for our provincial Minister of Education, who then became our Minister of Finance, Janet Ecker. I spent three and a half years working with her. She's a great mentor for me, and I learned a great deal with her.

So I'm here today. When we lost the provincial election, I went back home. I like to say that I trumped my cousins, and now they come to me for advice.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Helena Guergis: I really enjoy what I'm doing so far. I am a rookie member. It is not the first time I've run; I did do it provincially.

I look forward to working with all of you. It's not the committee that I had expected I would be on, but I can understand why, though, at the same time. I look forward to working with all of you and putting our swords down to reach the best conclusion for all Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you.

Rahim.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I too want to give congratulations to you, Chair, and our vice-chairs. It's going to be exciting working with all of you.

This was a great suggestion, to be able to learn about some of our colleagues. It's funny; as many of the veterans know, you work in this place for a number of years and sometimes you hardly know a thing about some of your colleagues, whether they are across the way or on your own side. So it's nice to take a moment to learn a little bit about people's backgrounds.

When my family came to Canada, I could speak neither English nor French because I was only nine months old at that time, so I was still in the process of learning. We came as refugees, as you mentioned, Mr. Chair. It was in 1972, when we were kicked out of Uganda. Many of you may recall that experience with Idi Amin, who came to power there and kicked everyone out of that country.

I was very fortunate to come to Canada and to be able to grow up here and become integrated quite quickly. For my parents, it's a great source of pride—as, I know, for many of you with your backgrounds—when they see their son 25 years later in this country being elected to Parliament. I think it was a real mark, especially for my father, to say, “Here we are, this is our country, this is our home”. For them it was a great experience, as it was for me.

This is my third term now, and I know, Lui, you asked if I came here in my diapers. I was very young when first elected. I was 25.

It's been an exciting experience, and I've been working on a lot of issues. I didn't plan to be on this committee, although I'm very excited to be here because I do have many interests regarding immigration, many of which have been mentioned. I look forward to working with all of you on that, and I also look forward to getting to know all of you better. This Parliament will be exciting, for sure.

Thank you.

● (0935)

The Chair: Thank you.

Nina.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also would like to congratulate you for being the chair, and the vice-chairs.

My name is Nina Grewal, and I was born in Japan. My father was a businessman. He stayed in Hong Kong, then he went to Japan, and then to west Africa, to a country called Liberia. When he was in Liberia, I studied in a boarding school in India. After that, I got my degree in English literature and history, and I married Gurmant in 1982. After being married to Gurmant, I headed to Africa as well, and there we had our own business. Both my boys were born in Liberia. Now they're 21 and 19.

In 1990 there was a civil war in Liberia, so we left Liberia in 1990. We left everything, whatever we had. We stayed in the U.K. for some time, and then in the United States, and then we immigrated to Canada in 1991. So here I am. Gurmant got involved in politics in 1997, and even I got involved in politics, and here I am, to make this country a better place and to make a difference.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's truly great.

I think Lui made just a brilliant suggestion. We're having minutes taken of this, so Diane...we'll have to get an update from her, but she'll get to read what we've said when she comes. It's the same for Colleen and also Mr. Anderson.

When I came here I was not quite in diapers. It was due to the Hungarian revolution in 1956, and we are going to be commemorating.... My God, we're coming up to the half-century mark; on October 24 we'll be doing the 48th commemoration. There's no question that the experience of having to flee, coming through minefields, really made an impression on me, particularly as human rights and civil liberties are concerned.

I remember coming in with my parents from the airport. It was a sunny day in June in 1957 as we came into Vancouver airport, and we were going down to the holding area for new arrivals on the waterfront. I remember my mother and my father were apprehensive, and they wondered if they'd made the right choice. If I have a regret in life, it's probably that I didn't tell them enough that they'd made the right choice, a very wise choice. It's a difficult thing to totally uproot oneself and go and get established someplace else, and it's much more difficult when you're older.

We were fortunate because we had a Canadian family who sort of adopted us for about four months. We lived with them in North Vancouver, and I remember, just before we were heading up to North Vancouver, we went through the Hungarian refugee section. In *The Vancouver Sun* there was a write-up that a mountain lion was sighted on Lynn Valley Road. We wondered if we had escaped from the Soviets to come over here to be cat food.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: And sure enough, the place where we stayed was right on the edge of the forest, so it was always with great trepidation that I walked around the forest looking for the lions.

In school we had absolutely no help in terms of English as a second language. You adapted by learning. Now, my father spoke five languages, so for him picking up a sixth one was very easy. For those who don't speak Hungarian, let me tell you, it's the most rational language in the world. The way you pronounce something is the way it's spelled, and you can go to the bank with that. Of course, when somebody told me how you had to spell "canoe" and it wasn't "k-a-n-u", I got into an argument with the teacher that no, that wasn't right. But anyway, I learned in the process.

I have been involved with multicultural stuff and human rights stuff, particularly trying to bring some kind of comfort to people of various cultures in the community, particularly during Desert Storm, getting the Arab groups together with the Jewish groups because there was a lot of tension. Those kinds of activities are very important in establishing the mayors' race relations committees, which is very important because we in Canada reflect the role of them, and there's no better example than if we just go around this committee.

I experienced first-hand what Hedy is working on, which is the brain waste issue, in terms of my family. My father had a degree in architecture and a graduate degree in planning. As mentioned, our first port of call was Vancouver. After five years he couldn't get a job in his profession in B.C. He was sent to a trade show; he worked for Pan-Abode. You'd know it, Bill; it's down on the Fraser River. He worked at Pan-Abode, and he got sent on a business trip to Montreal to help sell them since he could speak French. On the way back he could afford to stop in Toronto. He applied for a job at the city hall and got hired within a week, which truly says a lot about the difference between Vancouver and Toronto.

● (0940)

The brain waste issue is a huge issue. The information we have from the Conference Board of Canada is that we're losing \$4 billion to \$6 billion a year. That's a challenge we're undertaking with this committee, and that can really make an impression.

In 1998 I did not ask to be on the citizenship and immigration committee, but the Prime Minister asked me to be parliamentary secretary to the minister. We were dealing with the Citizenship Act, and I was very impressed with being parliamentary secretary to the minister, figuring I had gone through the front end and could now deal with policy. On the whole issue of a Canadian being a Canadian and making sure the Citizenship Act was in compliance with the Charter of Rights, I resigned as parliamentary secretary. Then I got banished from the committee by my caucus—or I should say by the whip, not the caucus—but I used to come anyway.

When we went on a cross-Canada tour, I would get my hotel paid if I was one of two Liberals. If there were three Liberals, Bill wouldn't pay for my hotel because those were the rules. There was that kind of silly game.

I'm pleased we got into democratic reform, where we as a committee could elect our chair instead of having the chair appointed, because I think that freed it up. Once we had our new prime minister, he opened it up and I was able to come back and be on this committee as an official Liberal member, and of course here the journey ends.

I'm excited, I really am, and I think we can really bring some very good wisdom to the process, because we have many problems. For MPs in areas where they have immigration, it's 80% of our caseload, and it's probably the most frustrating part of our caseload.

I really look forward to working with the committee and to working in a non-partisan fashion. I might say I resigned as parliamentary secretary and voted against the government. I found more comfort in the opposition than I found on my side, and it certainly changed my view. I remember when Rahim, during the

debates in 2000 on the Citizenship Act, and Inky.... It was very difficult for me to break ranks with the party, but I learned a very important lesson. The lesson I learned was that a good idea is a good idea is a good idea no matter where it comes from.

So I hope that collectively we can really make an impact for our country, and I thank you all very much.

Go ahead, Bill.

● (0945)

Mr. Bill Siksay: I just have a question, Mr. Chair, around the meeting times. I understood that we were part of group two and meeting times were Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9 to 11, not Mondays and Wednesdays. I just wonder if you can clarify that for me.

The Clerk: Well, we haven't had the official word from the whips; we haven't received a letter for the new block system. We've been told it's the status quo, so it's Mondays and Wednesdays, but you probably will be right once they come up with the official list for us.

The Chair: I certainly hope, Bill, that it's the case that it's Tuesday and Thursday. As soon as we get it, we'll send the information out and call a meeting for that time. Right now it's next Wednesday at 3:30, subject to change.

Thank you very much.

This has really been great. We'll have the other people who missed today report where they came from when they show up at the next meeting.

Thank you.

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