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—
Chair

Mr. Massimo Pacetti

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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Richard Dupuis): Good day.

[English]

Welcome.

[Translation]

Welcome to the Finance Committee. I see that we have a quorum. We will now proceed with the election of the Chair.

[English]

I am ready to receive motions for the election of the chair.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): I would like to nominate Massimo Pacetti for chair.

The Clerk: Are there other motions to that effect?

Ms. Minna moves that Mr. Pacetti be elected chair of the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I am going to proceed now to the election of the vice-chairs.

[Translation]

Our next item of business is the election of a Vice-Chair for the Official Opposition.

[English]

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Chairman, I defer to my colleague.

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Thank you. I'd like to nominate Mr. Charlie Penson for first vice-chair.

The Clerk: It is moved by Ms. Ambrose that Mr. Penson be elected vice-chair of the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

The Clerk: Moving along, we will now elect a second Vice-Chair for one of the other two opposition parties. I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

[English]

Mr. Monte Solberg: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to nominate Yvan Loubier.

The Clerk: It is moved by Mr. Solberg that Mr. Loubier be elected vice-chair of the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I will now ask Mr. Pacetti to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.)): I want to thank everybody for their confidence. Hopefully, you will have good chairmen.

I am looking for the next few meetings to be nice and smooth, hopefully like a finance committee and not a justice committee or a public accounts committee. I am hoping there will be cooperation from all members on both sides.

[Translation]

Our next order of business is the adoption of a motion respecting the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure: That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be composed of the Chair, two Vice-Chairs, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and a member from each of the other opposition parties.

The Clerk is proposing the following amendment to this motion: That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be composed of the Chair, two Vice-Chairs, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and one member from the other opposition party.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): There may be an error, Mr. Chairman. The motion reads: "a member from each of the other opposition parties". It should read: "and a member from the other opposition party". Since you're from the Government party... Just disregard this, Mr. Chairman. It's fine.

[English]

The Chair: Is everybody okay with the amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: The second concerns a quorum to receive evidence: that the chair be authorized to hold meetings, to receive and publish evidence when quorum is not present provided that the chair and at least two members are present, including a member of the opposition, and provided that if no member of the opposition is present ten minutes after the designated start of the meeting, the meeting may proceed.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Only when it's a matter of receiving evidence.

The Chair: That's correct.

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

• (1540)

The Chair: On research staff, the motion reads: that the committee retain the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament, as needed, to assist the committee in its work, at the discretion of the chair.

Is it agreed?

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Just a moment, Mr. Chairman. Why the reference “at the discretion of the Chair”? Why not at the discretion of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure? In my opinion, there are some situations that we need to assess collectively. Couldn't the Chair, the two Vice-Chairs and the ex-officio NDP member discuss matters and come to a decision?

The Chair: That's always been the case, but if you like, we can move an amendment, with the committee's consent, naturally. I have no problem with an amendment, if that's what members want.

Mr. Yvan Loubier: I don't know how other committee members feel about this.

[English]

The Chair: It is just the research staff, at the discretion of the chair.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Obviously, I don't have a problem if you want to amend it, but it seems to me to be an administrative thing, and the chair should be able to do the administrative things. It's mostly retaining research staff. If we thought that the research staff wasn't adequate, or enough, we could always demand more. It doesn't affect policy or affect how we do our work. So for the purpose of moving things along and letting the chair do his job.....

I mean, he could always consult with chairs. It's more a matter of basically getting research staff for the committee. We're talking about support services; it doesn't really entail anything else.

The Chair: Mr. McKay.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): I just don't see the point of fettering the discretion of the chair unless there is something that needs to fetter the discretion of the chair. It seems to me that this is completely and utterly administrative, and I don't know why you'd want to have a committee decide on something of that nature.

The Chair: I would tend to agree. It's a formality. I think it's just to speed up things.

[Translation]

This is how we have always conducted business. I for one see no need for an amendment.

Mr. Penson.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, CPC): I'm not sure why we would need to, and I would invite Mr. Loubier just to expand on that. Maybe he anticipates some problem.

It seems to me that if the committee is not getting the kind of research staff it needs, the chair had better move in that direction, or else...and there can be a change made to the chair. But I guess it would reflect a new reality of the committee, to have this, and I wonder if Mr. Loubier has something he would like to expand on as to why we need to make the change.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier: In the past, the Finance Committee has encountered a shortage of analysts when called upon to carry out special studies. When we asked for an additional analyst, our request was denied. When it came to large-scale undertakings, for example, the review of the Bank Act, we usually retained one or two analysts—more often one than two. I think this decision can be better evaluated by the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure than it can be by one single individual.

The Chair: Excuse me for interrupting, but we're discussing the committee, not the subcommittees.

[English]

So I think that would solve that one.

[Translation]

We're not dealing with the subcommittees, since they will have their own Chairs.

Mr. Yvan Loubier: No, I'm referring to the Subcommittee composed of the Chair, the two Vice-Chairs and an ex-officio member of the NDP. In some respects, it oversees the workings of the main committee and it should be the one to make decisions when it comes to retaining analysts and outside experts. I'm suggesting this amendment so that the committee can work in a more collegial atmosphere than it has in the past.

The Chair: If the Chair's request for additional analysts goes unheeded, I don't see how the subcommittee will be any more successful. It's merely a formality. At least that's how I see it.

[English]

I don't know if there are any other comments.

Hon. John McKay: You're our agent for the retaining of research staff, and if we as a committee don't think you've done a good job, I'm sure we'll be able to make our views known on that matter. So I see no point in having a committee when you have a committee—

• (1545)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier: I won't belabour the point. If we feel we need more analysts, we'll let you know. And if you don't heed our request, then we'll do whatever we have to do.

[English]

The Chair: I've been informed that over the last three years,

[Translation]

three analysts were assigned to the committee and in my view, we were well served.

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On the questioning of witnesses, the motion reads:

[Translation]

that witnesses be given up to 10 minutes for their opening statement; that during the questioning of witnesses, the time allocated to each questioner be as follows: on the first round of questioning, up to 10 minutes for the first question of each party; on the following rounds of questioning, up to 5 minutes for each subsequent questioner, at the discretion of the Chair.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

The Chair: For in camera meetings: that one copy of the transcript of all in camera meetings be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion reads: that whenever an order in council appointment is referred to the committee, the clerk shall obtain and circulate to each member of the committee a copy of the said appointment, that the committee be informed, and the clerk shall obtain and circulate to each member of the committee a copy of the said appointment with the appointee's curriculum vitae.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On the distribution of documents: that the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute to the members of the committee documents in the original language provided that the clerk and the chair would encourage the witnesses to submit their brief in both official languages, if at all possible, and would ask them if submitted in one language to submit it as earliest as possible to proceed to the translation.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

The Chair: The motion concerning witness expenses reads as follows: That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two (2) representatives per organization; and that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be at the discretion of the Chair.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Working meals: that the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide for working meals for the Committee and its subcommittees.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

The Chair: On televised meetings: that when a minister and the Governor of the Bank of Canada are to appear before the committee, the chair shall try to hold the meeting in a room in which it can be televised.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Mr. Chairman, I find this motion somewhat limiting. In my estimation, wherever possible, our meetings should be televised when we're discussing or considering bills, except when our meetings are in camera or if there is no meeting room available. Since the Finance Committee is an important House committee, it is in the public interest to have our proceedings televised, wherever possible.

The Chair: As I understand it, Mr. Loubier, this is the minimum requirement. The Chair does exercise some discretion.

Mr. Yvan Loubier: I understand that, but I'd like to suggest a different wording, namely: that the meetings of the committee be normally televised except when the committee's meeting is in camera or if there is no meeting room available for broadcasting.

[English]

The Chair: That should be okay.

John.

Hon. John McKay: I support Mr. Loubier's motion.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1550)

The Chair: The motion is on 48 hours' notice: that except for amendments to bills, 48 hours' notice be given before any substantive motion is considered by the committee, and that the motion be filed with the clerk of the committee and circulated to members in both official languages. Upon receipt of the notice, the clerk shall put the motion on the agenda of the committee's next meeting.

Are there any comments?

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. John McKay: I just want to circle back on the distribution of documents. I think it is frequent that a lot of witnesses put a lot of effort into appearing before this committee, and indeed all House committees, and in some instances it is very difficult to get their documents translated into a second official language, whatever that may be. I don't think the wording is offensive in and of itself, but I am a little concerned that we sometimes don't permit the distribution of documents that are in one official language. I think that is adhering to the silliness of the law instead of the spirit of the law.

I don't know whether your motion actually needs to be changed. It says "if at all possible, and would ask them if submitted in one". You could add "submitted and distributed". It doesn't become us if the witness shows up with his or her submission in one official language and, unless we make other arrangements, we can't read it.

The Chair: I've just been advised about this. It says "documents in the original language provided that the Clerk and the Chair would encourage the witnesses..."; it's not "obliged".

Hon. John McKay: Is that a fair understanding? What about the distribution?

The Chair: It says "authorized to distribute to the members". That's the second line, "That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to distribute...", and then later on it says "to encourage"—

Hon. John McKay: Is it a fair reading that the clerk will distribute things even though they may not be in both official languages? That's what I want clarified.

The Chair: Well, this is what it says. But I think it should be encouraged that the witnesses provide documents beforehand so we have ample time for documents to be translated.

Hon. John McKay: I don't have any objection to that. I think that's good. In the justice committee we wouldn't allow a document to be distributed unless it was in both official languages.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Mr. Chairman, my party and I absolutely insist that the principle of having documents in both official languages be fully respected. We need only encourage witnesses to submit their documents far enough in advance so that the House can arrange to have them translated, if they cannot afford to have them translated themselves. Either we have official bilingualism, or we do not. We can't have half measures.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Wasylycia-Leis.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): I would certainly support Mr. Loubier's understanding of the process at this committee or any other committee. I've certainly never been on a committee where in fact documents not translated in the other official language were permitted to be circulated. There are certainly ways for one to ask the witness for a copy privately, and we know we'll get the distribution done quickly and the translation executed, but I don't think that as a committee—and if there has been a different practice for the finance committee I am surprised by that—we should be encouraging anything but circulation in two official languages. We do that in other committees and we do it in our own offices. We just don't allow documents to be circulated in one language only.

The Chair: I don't think it's a practice; it is just that in the paragraph it says “encourage”. It's a loose term, and Mr. McKay had a problem with it. We are all on the same wavelength here. So we either keep it as is...or we go to Mr. Penson.

Mr. Charlie Penson: It is pretty clear in what it says: “would encourage the witnesses to submit their briefs in both official languages”. But if they come, they also give a verbal presentation at committee for which there is translation available, so we have the benefit of that. We wouldn't have the document if it were not translated, but the document would be circulated as soon as it was translated.

That's my understanding. Is that right?

The Chair: That's right. That should be the way it is. It could even be after the meeting, but we would encourage it to be before the meeting. That's a good point. The committee would go on an issue-by-issue basis.

Is there anything else?

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): I have a small question. On the distribution of documents, should the word “earliest” be “early”, grammatically? I help my daughter with her homework.

The Chair: You're talking to the wrong guy. I speak three languages, but none very well.

• (1555)

Mr. Don Bell: It should be “at the earliest opportunity” or “as early as possible”, I should think.

I spend my evenings helping my daughter.

The Chair: Is there anything else?

The Governor of the Bank of Canada is expected to be a witness on October 26 at 3:30 in the afternoon on the bank's monetary policy. I'm just letting you know. The notice will be going out this afternoon.

An hon. member: As early as possible.

The Chair: That's right, as early as possible.

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: I'm just wondering, Mr. Chairperson, what your plans are for calling the subcommittee, how fast you could do that, so that we could be actually meeting as a committee this week without letting too much time pass. As you know, this committee was called earlier than others because in fact there was considerable pressure to ensure that we had the time to do our pre-budget consultations before the end of November deadline for submission to Parliament. I would like to have some direction from you as to when we might do that so we could be actually in full committee by this week.

The Chair: I was going to suggest right after the meeting if there could be a representative from each party. If everybody's okay with that, it will be as soon as we end the meeting.

Is there anything else?

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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