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Tuesday, October 19, 2004

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Chair

Ms. Bonnie Brown

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• (1535)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Carmen DePape): Members of the committee, I see a quorum.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(1), your first order of business is to elect a chair. I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): I'd be delighted to nominate Bonnie Brown as chair. As a new member of this committee, I appreciate the leadership that she has shown and would be pleased to see her continue as chair of the health committee.

The Clerk: Are there further nominations?

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Ms. Brown chair of the Standing Committee on Health.

We will now proceed to the election of the first vice-chair. I am prepared to receive nominations for the first vice-chair.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): I'd like to nominate Mr. Merrifield.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Fletcher that Mr. Merrifield be elected vice-chair of the committee. Are there further nominations?

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Merrifield vice-chair of the committee.

We'll now proceed to the election of the second vice-chair.

[Translation]

I am ready to receive nominations for the position of second Vice-Chair.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): I nominate Mr. Menard.

The Clerk: It is moved by Ms. Demers that Mr. Menard be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee. Are there further nominations?

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Menard duly elected Vice-Chair of the Committee.

[English]

I invite Ms. Brown to now take the chair.

The Chair (Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.)): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

I'd first like to thank you for your expression of support. I would like to say I'm thrilled about the experience represented by the members who are returning to this committee. We will all be leaning on your corporate memory about the health committee and the health department.

I'm also happy to welcome the new members and the natural enthusiasm they bring to their new task, both on Parliament Hill and in particular in this committee.

I'm also delighted to learn that we will continue to have as our clerk Madame Carmen DePape, who has taken care of the election. Thank you, Carmen.

We do have, in a motion before us, the appointment as our researchers of two people who served us well in the last Parliament. Does everybody have these motions? The clerk's department will circulate the standard motions, which we will work our way through.

I'm wondering if we could take a moment to number these motions, one to five on page one and on the reverse, and six to eleven on the next page.

First is motion number one, about retaining the services of analysts from the Library of Parliament. Would someone like to move that?

• (1540)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): I so move.

The Chair: Is there any discussion of that motion? Seeing none, I'll call the question.

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

The Chair: I invite Nancy Miller Chenier and Sonya Norris to come to the table as the analysts from the Library of Parliament. Those who are experienced will know we should welcome them with a round of applause for the work they do.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: I'm wondering if we could bypass motion number two and move to motion number three, and I'll explain that at the end. We'll work our way through as many as we can, and then I want to go back to two and four. Could we move to motion three now?

It is moved by Madam Chamberlain. Is there any discussion of that motion? Seeing none, I'll call the question.

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

• (1545)

The Chair: Now to motion five. This is the usual thing that happens at all committees: we pay for the witnesses' expenses. Who would like to move that motion?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): I so move.

The Chair: Is there any discussion of that motion? Seeing none, I'll call the question.

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

The Chair: Moving to motion six, would anybody like to move that motion? Mr. Ménard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): There is some wording which we are intent on having, Madam Chair. I will read it to you: "That no document from a witness be distributed without the authorization of the Clerk."

[*English*]

The Chair: This is the usual motion, I believe, Mr. Ménard, and this committee has been very good about not allowing distribution of documents if they were not translated. What is your worry?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: All right, but could we adopt it to ensure that it is in accordance with our wishes? It has happened that some witnesses have taken upon themselves to distribute documents. We want to ensure that no document is distributed if it is not in both official languages. So, let's adopt it to be sure.

[*English*]

The Chair: Would you like to move this motion, Mr. Ménard?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any discussion of this motion?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: The motion we moved is: "That no document from a witness be distributed without the authorization of the Clerk."

[*English*]

The Chair: In other words, we don't want witnesses to come and have their friend run around the table giving out documents. No documents can be distributed unless the clerk has seen them, and of course then it's subject to the rule that they must be in both languages.

An hon. member: — [*Inaudible—Editor*]—

The Chair: Yes. This is just to put a check on the free distribution of papers, as some witnesses sometimes do. This is the motion as amended, the amendment being that it can't be done without the clerk's authorization. That amendment has been generally agreed upon.

I'll call the question with that amendment.

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

The Chair: Number seven is working meals. If we're going to sit over the lunch or the supper hour, we are authorized to order meals. It is moved by Mrs. Chamberlain. Any discussion?

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): That's by the chair, right?

The Chair: The chair and the clerk. I'm very tightfisted with the money, but I'll try to take your advice, and I'm sure Mr. Merrifield as first vice-chair can lobby for better meals.

All those in favour of that motion?

Mr. Michael Savage: Could the resolution also add that those meals should be healthy meals in accordance with good health practices?

The Chair: Did you want to add a formal amendment, or should we just make a note in the minutes?

Mr. Michael Savage: I sense no unanimous agreement on this.

The Chair: There is no formal amendment, so we will take the motion as it stands.

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

The Chair: Motion number eight, on in-camera meetings and their transcripts, is moved by Mr. Lunney.

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

The Chair: Motion nine, on substantive motions, is what we call the 48-hour rule. It's pretty normal, so that we have time to think about what somebody wants to debate and move.

That's moved by Ms. Dhalla.

Mr. Rob Merrifield: With the exception of the unanimous consent of the committee—that is, the unanimous consent of the committee would supercede this.

The Chair: I'll just ask the clerk. That's what I would think.

Mr. Rob Merrifield: That's fine then.

The Chair: This becomes a relevant question in a few minutes, when we talk about our assignment and the days we've been assigned to have meetings.

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

The Chair: Motion number ten deals with staff at in-camera meetings.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Has it been the practice of the committee, Madam Chair?

The Chair: I'm just trying to recall. I don't remember this motion before.

A voice: We had it last year.

The Chair: We had it last year. Mr. Savage is willing to move it.

Any discussion about this?

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph, Lib.): For clarification, does that mean, for instance, that if the member isn't there but they want to follow it, they could send staff, or only if the member is present?

The Chair: It means only if the member is present that he or she may have a staff person sitting behind them.

Any questions about that? I'm just wondering about the free flow of discussion with staff in the room.

Mr. Ménard.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard: I think that if a colleague cannot attend because he is sitting in another committee—it can happen that we sit on two committees—we have to allow him to ask his parliamentary assistant to come and take notes for him.

Often times we may have to sit on two committees at the same time and we can be in a bind. The objective is for the member to be as informed as possible. Either way, staff does not attend in camera sittings where reports are adopted. However, if a sitting is not in camera, I don't think we should stop our parliamentary assistants from attending, even if we are not there.

• (1550)

[English]

The Chair: Now I'm confused. Do you want your staff member there if you can't be at an in-camera meeting?

Mr. Robinson actually suggested an amendment last year that would cover that contingency: "that unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to have one staff person present at in-camera meetings only when the member himself or herself is absent for a documented reason". That would be illness or another committee.

Is that agreeable to people? I think that would assuage Mr. Ménard's concern. We could add it as an amendment.

Mr. Thibault.

[Translation]

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): I believe there may be some confusion as to what Mr. Ménard said. In fact, Mr. Ménard is talking about something totally different from in camera sessions. We are now discussing specifically in camera meetings. According to this motion, each member would be allowed to have one staff person present at in camera meetings. When you spoke, you said "except during in camera meetings".

In my opinion, this is very risky. Our staff should only be present when we are. Otherwise, they should not be there at all. The subjects of discussions during in camera meetings are often delicate, and we have to deal with the consequences if someone repeats what was said at those meetings. That is not necessarily the case for the staff. There would be other people present who would participate in these meetings. I feel that if we are to allow staff, it should be only when the member is present, and not to replace him or her.

There are other ways to replace a member, for example by calling on other members of the caucus, if one knows in advance that the subject is very important and that the member will not be present. We were elected to be here and to represent the people. It would worry me somewhat if we were to accept that members of our staff could sit in for us.

[English]

The Chair: I agree with you. That's what I heard from Mr. Ménard the first time, but I wanted to propose this other idea because what I'm concerned about is not so much the Liberals or the Conservatives; I'm worried about the Bloc and the NDP being assigned to so many committees that they can literally lose touch with the goings-on at the... Say their other committee is reviewing legislation and we might have two or three serious meetings in camera. Mr. Blaikie and Madame Demers or Mr. Ménard will be left out if in fact there isn't somebody tracking it for them. That was the concern of the previous representative from the NDP as well.

So there are two questions essentially before us. One is the question of the people who are absent during an in camera meeting. Can they have a staffer there taking notes? It's not inconsequential what you mentioned as to the repercussions for people talking out of turn after those meetings. The other question is whether the members will feel totally free to discuss things in camera if other people, staff persons, are here.

Let's deal with what at one time was an amendment, and that is to allow staff persons of absent members to be present at in camera meetings. Would anybody like to move that as an amendment?

Mr. Fletcher.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: I just wanted to make the committee aware that I always have a health care aide with me, so hopefully that is exempt from...

The Chair: Yes, we're aware of that, but this would be if you were unable to come to the meeting and you wanted to send a staff person, either your aide or someone else from your office. That's the question. It isn't officially before us, because no one has moved an amendment to that effect.

Mr. Blaikie.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Chair, just for the sake of debate, I'll move an amendment to that effect, with the same wording that was moved previously by Mr. Robinson or suggested in the previous parliament.

I think we're in the position where we have the most to lose, if you like, by not being able to do so, because if I'm not here, it's not a question of there being another New Democrat on the committee. This is certainly a situation that I would try desperately to avoid, because frankly my instinct is that in camera meetings should be in camera meetings. So it's something I would pledge to use very sparingly. But if the committee can see its way to doing that, then that would be fine for me, but if it can't...

I was in a committee yesterday where this very same amendment did pass, but not every committee is the same. I would make a representation to that effect and move the motion.

•(1555)

The Chair: Mrs. Chamberlain, and then Mr. Thibault.

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain: I'd like to support that amendment. This is a minority parliament and I think we want to do things differently. I think we want to cooperate fully. There are many times when people can't come. I think I would agree with Bill certainly that to use it sparingly is wise, because of the confidentiality aspect of it. But I also think members are pulled in many different ways, and sometimes you have to be somewhere else. That's just the reality of this situation. So I'm certainly going to support that amendment.

Hon. Robert Thibault: ... [*Inaudible—Editor*]... that can be seen by members of the committee. If we permit a situation where members of the committee can be absent at in camera meetings and be represented by a staff member, we lack a bit of control as to who has access to that information and who is sworn in and not sworn in. We are all sworn in as members.

I participated in a committee last year where a citizen made a presentation to that committee in camera, and there were two leaks of that information—not by the same party but by two parties, whether inadvertent or not. That individual's privacy was compromised because of it having come out. It's very serious.

In my mind, if you have an in camera meeting and somebody makes a presentation in camera to us as committee members, they have to be assured that that is private and confidential information. So I have concerns for those reasons, and I find it difficult to support.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Madam Chair, one of the things that I didn't suggest the other day, but which did come to mind, is this is a provision that could be waived at any time by the committee if it was felt that there was a particularly sensitive situation. There may be situations like that where you only want to have members present. It's not something that can't be transcended if need be, as long as we're all working together on this. If at any time there's a feeling concerning a particular witness or a particular something or other and we can't have anybody there but members, then tough for those of us who can't be here. I accept that. If we could pass it with that understanding, that would cover it.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Can it be noted?

The Chair: We could add something. It talks about something being allowed, and we could put at the end “with the understanding that this allowance could be waived by the members present at the committee in particularly sensitive situations”.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: It's actually in the wording that Mr. Robinson put forward, because he said “unless otherwise ordered”.

The Chair: That's right, “unless otherwise ordered”. I guess that would cover it.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: He was probably covering that.

The Chair: Good.

Are there any other comments? Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney: I think we're moving toward consensus, but the thing I wanted to raise was we already have a provision for other members to replace us when we're not here.

I just wonder if the clerk has some mechanism for keeping track of whose staff belongs to whom, because we don't really know all the

staff members. Would there be advance notice or some mechanism for this thing, rather than having somebody come in at the last moment and saying I'm representing so-and-so? We really don't know. Staff does often change during the year in some offices.

The Chair: That is another issue. We could probably talk about it at the end.

Mr. James Lunney: I see it as a complication as a consequence of the motion, which we would probably have to deal with.

The Chair: Yes, and that could be true in many meetings, and particularly in-camera meetings, so that we have only authorized staff here. I still think it's a separate question.

I would like to call the question now on the amendment to the motion that is before you, number ten, proposed by Mr. Blaikie.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

•(1600)

The Chair: Motion number eleven, on purchasing documents, is the standard motion. Who would like to move that?

Mr. Réal Ménard: I so move.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

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

The Chair: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

I'd like you to flip back and look at motion number two, which I asked you to skip over. Thank you for that indulgence.

It has been the tradition on this committee that we not have what is called here a subcommittee on agenda and procedure, and for one main reason: it was to enhance the democracy of the committee. Some of us, when we first came, were exposed to committees where there was a steering committee, which is the short name for this. As the steering committee seemed to be deciding the agenda and the procedure, there were two problems. First, people felt left out. There was the A team and the B team. I don't like that; I like us all to be on one team.

The second thing was that very often the steering committee would meet for two hours to decide a series of things and they would come to the committee only to have everything they decided overturned. It was like the committee had an executive but the votes of the full committee could overturn the decisions of the executive. What really happened was the chair and a few others ended up talking about the same thing at two separate meetings for two hours each. My feeling is that we have a chair and two vice-chairs, and we could meet occasionally—not to decide agenda and procedure, which is for the whole committee, but if we think there is something arising that might be contentious.

As far as the planning and the putting together of the agenda, we didn't have this motion the last time. We did it as a group. We would perhaps strike an extra meeting, and everybody had their say. It created a better morale, if you know what I mean, among the members.

Mr. Merrifield.

Mr. Rob Merrifield: We had exactly what you were saying last time, and I think that worked very well. The situation I would see being productive is the same thing, if the two vice-chairs together with yourself had the ability to get together prior to...to be able to deal with controversial issues or to iron things out. That would be productive enough for me. It's not to make any decisions as far as the direction of the committee. I think you're absolutely right, the committee has to be its own master when it comes to that. But I don't know how to do that in a motion, other than that we just strike the last line.

The Chair: We're silent.

Mr. Blaikie, I'm sure, will have an opinion on this.

Mr. Rob Merrifield: The thing I was a little concerned about last time is that sometimes I felt the chair took some liberties the odd time.

The Chair: No!

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Honestly, it's true. I know it's hard to believe.

•(1605)

The Chair: I didn't keep you informed enough?

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Yes. Actually, there was an information gap there that I think we want to correct this time.

The Chair: Okay. I take that, and particularly in a minority parliament situation. But Mr. Blaikie is going to lose a seat on the steering committee, so he's wondering about that.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I trust there is no steering committee, that we're all the steering committee. I might be new to the committee, Madam Chair, but I'm not new. In fact, I did sit on the committee once before, from 1980 to 1984.

I'm prepared to live with the tradition that was established here in this committee if you felt it was going well, but I do have some concerns that when you feel there's something to iron out or that there are problems, that you don't just talk to the vice-chairs, that you talk to the members of all the parties. I promise you that if I get the feeling that things are being ironed out without us, there will be a procedural brouhaha. Otherwise, I think if we can work as a whole committee on this, that's cool.

The Chair: Thank you.

So we won't pass motion number two.

Now we move to motion number four. I should report to the new members that last year, or maybe it was after the last election, we had about three meetings on what our procedure would be here. I have asked the clerk to bring the motion that we finally agreed upon. You can look at it and see if you can agree to that again, because it's more precise.

The clerk is giving out a paper and it's at the bottom of that page.

We say that the questioning of witnesses be limited to five minutes per member, and essentially that's usually... In directing the first two questions to members of the official opposition, it seems to me that traditionally the lead critic sometimes took seven minutes, which only left three minutes for the second person. Essentially the first paragraph boils down to ten minutes for the official opposition, hopefully to be divided among two members, but not always, and then five minutes for the Bloc, and then the Liberals come in, and then the NDP. From then on it's back and forth, five minutes each.

Is that okay with people?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Let's move on to the next one. I've always been a bit concerned about this one because it means that 35 minutes of questioning go by before the Liberals even get in. It can be pretty boring when you know you're stuck there without a chance to...

You just have one paragraph. I have it divided into two, but it is the word "that" in line five, "that during the appearance of a minister".

Mr. Ménard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: As far as the issue of ministers is concerned, I think it's understandable that a half hour go by. It is the principle of ministerial responsibility. Members on the government side can question ministers during their caucus meetings, and it is the role of the opposition to be particularly vigilant where ministers are concerned. I believe we must accept that. When witnesses are not ministers, the rule you have always enforced is that members must have an opportunity to speak if we want them to come back. On the other hand, when they are ministers, you have to acknowledge that the official opposition and the other opposition parties have a responsibility that the government side does not have. That does not mean that the government cannot ask any questions, but I do not see how we can change this rule without denying the principle of ministerial accountability.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mrs. Chamberlain.

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain: I would just correct Mr. Ménard's thinking on that. We don't get an opportunity to ask in caucus. That's the reality. Many times this is the only spot we do get a chance to ask. And you might find great sympathy for your position among some Liberals. You know, you may be cutting us out when you shouldn't.

The Chair: It's true that we do not ask questions of ministers in caucus. We present our ideas to the ministers, and occasionally ministers respond in caucus, but not always. It's our presentation. It's our time to present to the ministers. That's how we see caucus.

So Mrs. Chamberlain is correct.

Mr. Blaikie.

•(1610)

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I don't know if this is the way it has been done recently in this committee, but it does seem to me to be a bit...

The Chair: Lengthy?

Hon. Bill Blaikie: What I would recommend is what applies in some other committees that I'm aware of, and that is, particularly when ministers appear, you have a first round in which all parties are equal. And then you start to apportion the rest of it out proportionately, which would mean for instance in my case that I wouldn't get anything after that—unless, of course, nobody else was here and I had to question the minister all by myself.

It seems to me there might be an argument for having a first round in which all the parties are equal. That is the way it's done in some other committees. If I'm offending against the recent tradition of this committee... Certainly when I was on it years ago, that was the way it was done—it was ten minutes for every party in the first round. But that was a different era.

The Chair: He's trying to say ten minutes for the NDP, ten minutes for the Bloc, and ten minutes for the Conservatives. And I'm sure Mr. Merrifield—

Hon. Bill Blaikie: And then the rest of the questions, where the Conservatives and others are going to get a whole lot more questions than someone like myself. That's one way of doing it.

The Chair: And Mr. Merrifield could decide, as the lead critic for the Conservatives, to split his fifteen minutes into eight and seven too, which would be okay.

Mr. Merrifield wants to respond to that suggested change.

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Yes, I'll respond to the suggested change.

One of the problems we had in the last Parliament, and I think we'll have it in this one as well, is that quite often we didn't get the minister for that terribly long either, so we felt quite restricted in the minister's time. He'd come for maybe an hour, or sometimes even less—he or she.

We feel that this is more proportionate and is appropriate. It has worked and functioned well.

I know Mr. Blaikie is new to this committee, but this is a tradition of this committee and it has worked very well. I don't know why we'd want to disrupt it.

The Chair: Does anybody want to make an amendment to this double motion, once for regular witnesses and once for ministers?

Mr. Blaikie.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I'm not trying to pick a fight over this, Madam Chair, I'm just saying that I think Mr. Merrifield makes a good point. That is, this really wouldn't be a big deal if we had more access to the ministers.

So why don't we try to work on creating a Parliament, or in this case creating a relationship between the committee and the minister, where we don't have to jealously say if I don't get everything in during this ten minutes, that's the only ten minutes I'm going to have for the next three months with the minister.

Again, sorry to keep sounding like the old timer in the crowd here, but the time that ministers spend with committees has diminished over the years. If ministers could come and spend more time with committees explaining what they're up to, or at least pretending to explain, then we might be better off.

The Chair: Thank you.

Seeing that no one is ready to move an amendment to this motion, I'll accept a motion that moves this particular—

Mr. Rob Merrifield: I so move.

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

•(1615)

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, I think we now have dealt with the rules of this committee.

The clerk has received three notices of motion from Mr. Merrifield and one from Mr. Ménard. I will ask the clerk to distribute them. We will not be debating these issues today. It's simply to alert you that they will come up in 48 hours, according to the bylaw, unless we do something to change that.

There are two motions that have to do with the agenda. We won't debate them today. One talks about the health minister appearing on Tuesday, October 26, and the other one requests that he appear no later than Thursday, November 19. I think it would be prudent of me to try to do some research on this as to whether the minister is available and to bring that information to the committee before we vote on it.

The hepatitis C issue is a stand-alone item, and the main estimates and the Auditor General motion are stand-alone items.

Mr. Thibault.

Hon. Robert Thibault: I'm new to the committee, not a returnee like the Old Democrat.

I wonder if it's acceptable to make an oral notice of motion to invite Mr. Kristopher Knowles to appear before the committee at his earliest convenience. He is the young gentleman, 13 years of age, who's walking across the country for the purpose of encouraging organ donations. He will be visiting Ottawa at one point. I'd like to make a notice of motion that we invite him to appear before the committee.

The Chair: Usually notices of motion have to be on paper. To be courteous to a new member, can I get agreement from the committee that if he gets this on paper and to the clerk, after this meeting it will be accepted as a written notice of motion? Is that agreed?

A voice: Sure.

The Chair: Okay. Usually you must have your notice of motion ready and to the clerk—or can they just bring it themselves? They should send it to the clerk, and then she will provide it, particularly if it might need translation.

I have talked to the whips' office, and apparently we are assigned the committee slot of Tuesdays and Thursdays at 3:30 p.m. My experience leads me to believe that trying to get a quorum on Thursday at 3:30 is a little more difficult than getting a quorum on Tuesday at 3:30. You will recall that there is usually an extra slot in the week that committees try to take up as their business increases, as the need to meet increases; that is, Wednesday at 3:30. I'm wondering if you would authorize me to ask the clerk to see if she can secure a regular meeting room on Wednesday at 3:30, so that we would go into a different mode; that is, our regular meetings would be Tuesday and Wednesday at 3:30, and should we get into some heavy workload, we then might have to also add Thursday.

I'm just thinking, for those people who come Sunday night and go home Thursday night, they are very unhappy about late meetings on Thursday afternoon.

Mr. Blaikie, then Mr. Merrifield.

• (1620)

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Madam Chair, I would like to register my opposition to that. There's a reason that some committees meet on Mondays and Wednesdays and others meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays: so the people who work on another committee that's in the Monday and Wednesday slot can be on two different committees. We've been assigned our critic area of responsibilities with that somewhat in mind.

For instance, I'm the defence critic for the NDP. The defence committee meets on Monday afternoons and Wednesday afternoons. And if the health committee is going to meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays, that's fine with me; but if the health committee starts meeting on Wednesday afternoon, at the same time as when the defence committee was slotted to meet, I have a big problem.

The Chair: Okay, that's fine.

There were a number of years when committees never met on Monday. Everybody met Tuesday and Thursday, and the extra meeting was for Wednesday afternoon. I had literally forgotten that there was a change and that some committees are now meeting Monday and Wednesday. I thank you for reminding me of that.

I think that's only about the last year, is it not?

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I don't know. Committees used to meet on Mondays all the time. They may have stopped meeting on Mondays at some point. They used to meet on Thursday nights.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: My only point was if we are going to change the dates or look at room bookings, if it is possible to have it in Centre Block, it's easier for a variety of reasons.

The Chair: Thank you. The clerk has already apprised me of that request, and we will try to accommodate it as much as we can.

Mrs. Chamberlain.

Hon. Brenda Chamberlain: I just wondered if Mr. Blaikie would be open then to 5:30 to 7:30 on a Wednesday evening.

We are in a different Parliament here, and particularly the Conservative members travel a long way—some of them eight, ten, twelve, fourteen hours to get here, by the time they do their stopover. There is constituency stuff. We don't know how long this Parliament

will go or won't go. People have to tend to their constituencies, there's no question.

I'm wondering if there's a possibility of some sort of consideration of that, Mr. Blaikie.

The Chair: The problem with Tuesdays and Thursdays—say Thursday morning, which sounds like an ideal solution—is that the committees are really running hard on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I don't think quite as many meet Mondays and Wednesdays.

For now, we have been assigned Tuesday and Thursday, and we would have to also figure out if we could get a room in Centre Block, if we change a meeting time. Perhaps the clerk could investigate possibilities that would not conflict with Mr. Blaikie's assignments.

What about you, Mr. Ménard, do you have two committees?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: I would prefer we held our meetings and Tuesdays and Thursdays. If we could have a meeting on Wednesday at 5:30 or 6 o'clock, I could be available, but I would prefer we held them on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): I feel the same way, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

Any other comments? Mr. Merrifield.

Mr. Rob Merrifield: I like your recommendation that the clerk investigate and bring back to the committee some options and then we can talk about this at another time, taking in mind the concern of the NDP.

The Chair: Within the assigned meeting times, the clerk tells me, we have priority for the rooms, but once we move out of our assigned slot, the committees that are in the slot we want have priority. So they can move us out, even though we've booked a room. So that is another problem.

Mr. Thibault.

Hon. Robert Thibault: We were discussing earlier a steering committee. We decided not to have one, but we said there can be discussions with the two co-chairs. I think this would be an ideal example, with the chair and the two co-chairs, but include the member from the New Democrats in the discussions to see if you can find better times to meet.

The Chair: I agree, and that will happen. We'll talk again about the actual meeting date.

For this week, right now the clerk reports to me that she can get Room 237-C on Thursday, from eleven to one. It's not booked. How does that sound to people, as opposed to 3:30 to 5:30? That's the room across the hall, from eleven to one on Thursday.

The clerk is also saying that we can book it, but we could get bumped by somebody in that group, eleven to one.

In any case, Mr. Thibault is suggesting that we not drag this on.

Yes, Mr. Carrie.

• (1625)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Chair, I had a question on motion number nine, with the 48-hour agreement. Would that switch that around? Would it be unanimous all the time then?

The Chair: If we were going to reduce the 48-hour requirement for whatever reason, it would require unanimous consent of the committee. We could do that if in fact we were meeting on Thursday, eleven to one. We could shorten it up, but it takes unanimous consent.

Mr. Rob Merrifield: Can we get unanimous consent now?

The Chair: Well, just a minute. We haven't decided whether eleven to one is a good thing to look for on the clerk's part. The thing is, she could book it, we could get bumped, and we would have to alert everybody that we have to meet at 3:30 because we lost the room. But we could try to get it at the earlier hour. Is that agreeable to everybody?

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Chair, I think I have another committee assignment on Thursday morning, the privacy committee.

The Chair: Is it nine to eleven, or eleven to one?

Mr. Michael Savage: I don't have my schedule with me for that day. I'm not sure. Maybe the clerk knows.

The Chair: The meetings are Mondays and Wednesdays with that committee.

The Clerk: Is it the access to information committee?

Mr. Michael Savage: It's privacy and access to information, yes. I guess that's it.

The Chair: That's Mondays and Wednesdays.

Okay. I would remind people that at some point we're going to have to fit in two references from the House. One is the report of the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board, which is permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Health. The question is whether we want to examine it. The other is the report of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

That's two possible things we could look at. And another one is the Quarantine Act, which will probably be coming to us fairly quickly. It's already in the House. So that's just to give you an idea of what might be coming up fairly quickly in addition to these motions.

At the present moment, if we meet on Thursday, at whatever time we meet, we will have these motions to debate. Then we could discuss some future business after we do the motions, if that is agreeable to everyone.

Are there any other issues you wish to raise?

An hon. member: I move we adjourn.

The Chair: There's a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney: Are you asking if there are other suggestions for the committee agenda?

The Chair: No, not at this stage.

Mr. James Lunney: That discussion will take place later.

The Chair: Yes. There are some things we may have to do before we have some choice.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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