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Chair

Mr. Pat O'Brien

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Monday, October 18, 2004

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.)): I would like to call to order the second meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs in this first session of the 38th Parliament of Canada.

I would like to begin with a friendly reminder. Returning members will recall this. We all have our pet peeves, and a number of us decided that one of our pet peeves is when our or others' cellphones go off during our meetings, be they the cellphones of the audience, of the media, or of members. So I would ask anyone in attendance in this room at this time to please silence your cellphones and all other such equipment so that we won't be interrupted in the course of our deliberations. Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we have a number of routine motions to go through. You will recall that some of our regular members could not be with us at our first meeting, and we laid over until today most of the routine motions for consideration by the various parties. Let's go through them. We have, obviously, some new colleagues on the committee, so there may be questions or comments as we go through these. Maybe we'll be cautious and just deal with these one at a time.

All colleagues have the orders of the day with the routine motions in front of you, I assume. Okay.

On the first motion, I just want to put this thought out. Rather than have a so-called steering committee, or a subcommittee on agenda and procedure, some standing committees have apparently decided that they will do that as a committee of the whole, or the whole committee will just participate in those, I guess given the smaller number of committee members from past times.

I'm in the hands of the committee. Does somebody want to move this or move something else on the matter of the subcommittee?

Mrs. Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Oshawa, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would move that matters with respect to agenda and procedure be handled by the whole committee. I think that saves us a lot of time and effort. It's been my view that while the subcommittee may have the discussion, it comes back to the main committee for ratification, and there's generally a fairly detailed and lengthy discussion by the main committee. So rather than have that intermediary step, we should just go to the main committee.

The Chair: Do I have a seconder for Mrs. Longfield's motion? Mr. Rota.

The motion is moved and seconded that we not strike a special subcommittee on agenda and procedure but that the entire committee in fact do that.

Mr. Blaikie, speaking to that.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Chairman, although I think this comes from a good place, if you like, I know that opposition members and perhaps even government members were concerned about two things. One, of course, was about the parliamentary secretary being on the committee. The second, if we had gone on to this particular motion, or if we do end up going on to it, was about the fact that the parliamentary secretary would be on the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. I think you'd have found that there would have been a motion to remove the parliamentary secretary from the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

Now, if we don't succeed, or if this committee were to move a motion that passed, calling on the government to remove the parliamentary secretary from the committee, and the government didn't respect that, then by default, if the committee became the body that made these scheduling decisions, we would have the parliamentary secretary present for everything, including the meetings and the subcommittee on agenda. If the committee has it within its power to set up a subcommittee on agenda and procedure that doesn't include the parliamentary secretary, it doesn't have to have the government cooperate with its recommendation in order to achieve that.

So I would not want to support this motion until such time as I knew the disposition of the committee with respect to the parliamentary secretary and the disposition of the government with respect to the disposition of the committee on the parliamentary secretary. That's my view of the matter.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Bachand.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Chairman, I've been a member of this committee for a mere four years, but an MP for almost eleven now. Prior to that, I sat on the Aboriginal Affairs Committee and I found the subcommittee served a purpose. At some point, it's important for us to decide the issues on which the committee should focus its attention. Obviously the main committee has the final say, but I think our job would be much easier if we maintained the subcommittee as is.

The motion also refers to the composition of the subcommittee. I'm wondering how we are going to proceed, from a procedural standpoint. I'd like us to keep the wording of the original motion in the agenda. However, I don't want the parliamentary secretary to be a member of the subcommittee.

If I understand correctly, a motion has been moved to do away with the subcommittee. I plan to vote against this proposal. Then I'd like us to come back to the question of the composition of the subcommittee as such.

[English]

The Chair: Very good.

Other speakers? Mr. Casson.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): I would like to say that we'll support staying with what was previously indicated, not the motion that was presented by the member opposite. But it is our concern as well that the parliamentary secretary issue needs to be handled. I believe there's a consensus on this committee, certainly on this side of the committee, that the parliamentary secretary not be involved, and certainly not get involved in the subcommittee.

We'll be supporting the establishment of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

The Chair: Thank you.

As our friend Monsieur Bachand noted, we have a motion, so we have to dispense with that. Mrs. Longfield's motion is to not strike a subcommittee but that the committee as a whole function in that way.

I don't see any further speakers.

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: Now back to the original thought. If you'll recall, I did call for anybody who wanted to move this item to do so, before Mrs. Longfield made her motion. So it's on the floor, and I put it again, would someone like to move that we do establish a subcommittee on agenda and procedure?

Mr. Blaikie moves, seconded by Mr. Casson, that SCNDVA does strike a subcommittee.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I do move a motion to establish a subcommittee on agenda and procedure, with the following words: that the chair, the two vice-chairs, another representative of the government other than the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Defence, and a representative of each of the opposition parties do compose the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

The Chair: Mr. Casson seconds that.

Discussion? Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Actually, to exclude a member of Parliament from any committee I think may violate my rights as a member of Parliament. So I think we should table this particular motion until we get a ruling on it. I think it is a matter of privilege, and I think it violates my rights, as a member of Parliament, to do my work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

This is a bit of a touchy point, and I understand that. We will have a few points that are a little more touchy than others, so I would really ask your indulgence to speak through the chair. I'll do my utmost to recognize everybody and give everybody a fair shot at it. In the past, that's the good spirit we've operated in.

Before I go to Mr. Casson, just by way of information for the committee, apparently this motion that Mr. Blaikie has moved has been moved and carried at other committees.

The other thing—and I sent Mr. Blaikie a motion in the House during the QP, and I see him nodding that he received it—is that I'm informed that all the leadership of all the parties—

• (1545)

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Not true.

The Chair: Okay, I guess we're misinformed. But it was my information that all the parties had agreed to the membership of the various committees, including the one we have now.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Not according to my books.

The Chair: Okay. I'm seeing Mr. Blaikie....

At any rate, I put that on the table.

I have three speakers, beginning with Mr. Casson—

Hon. Bill Blaikie: This is my motion, and I think the parliamentary secretary misunderstands the motion.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: This motion has to do with the composition of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure, and the committee is within its rights to appoint anybody it likes to the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

If you have a point at all, which I don't think you do, it has to do with a motion to remove you from the committee. But the subcommittee on agenda and procedure is completely within the—

The Chair: That's correct, yes.

I'm going to go in order, starting with Mr. Casson.

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Chairman, I agree with Mr. Blaikie that this committee is within its realm to establish the subcommittee and the membership thereof. So for the parliamentary secretary to say that this somehow infringes on his rights as a member of Parliament is not right. Precedent has been set, as you indicated, on other committees.

I think it's very important, if we as a committee are going to function in a meaningful manner, that all parties be able to get together at this subcommittee level to establish what the agenda will be without direct interference from the parliamentary secretary as a spokesman for the minister.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have Mrs. Longfield, Mr. Martin, and then Mr. Bachand.

Hon. Judi Longfield: Mr. Chair, I would argue that the idea of a subcommittee on procedure and agenda, and the reason it's struck with members from the various parties, is that each party has an opportunity to put its views forward. We are not in any way suggesting to the parties opposite that we choose, or that we suddenly would say, for example, that I am opposed to the critic for the official opposition being on the committee. I think it's up to each caucus to determine themselves who they want as a representative on the committee on procedure and agenda.

If somehow the opposition are opposed to the words "parliamentary secretary", I would suggest that they could say, "a member of the Liberal caucus", and we choose who it is. My view is that it's undue influence for any party to dictate who is going to represent the party.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin: I may be a parliamentary secretary, but I'm also a member of Parliament. Being the PS is part of my duties as a member of Parliament. Therefore, to exclude me from the committee as a PS and an MP would infringe upon my ability to do my job. What I'm suggesting to the committee is that we receive a legal opinion on this, a procedural opinion, to see whether or not Mr. Blaikie's motion is indeed in order or whether in fact it is out of order.

I would submit to the committee that we table this motion for the time being, we receive an opinion on this from the House to ensure that it is legal, and then we proceed from there.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: On the question of breaching the rights of a member, of course Mr. Martin is an MP, but he is also a duly sworn Parliamentary Secretary. As such, he could go to Privy Council and be briefed on the various issues brought to our attention.

I do not think that a parliamentary secretary is in a position to contradict the Minister of Defence's position on a certain issue. The problem is that he is required to toe the line as determined by the Minister of Defence. There's a simple solution to this problem: Mr. Martin could resign as Parliamentary Secretary and then I'd have no problem with him serving on the subcommittee. Right now, the only problem I see is the fact that he is the parliamentary secretary.

As for examining legal studies to see if there are any precedents, I have to say that during this last Parliament, some committees voted unanimously to exclude parliamentary secretaries from committees. I don't see why we should have to conduct an in-depth study with parliamentary experts to see if they can or cannot sit on the committee. It's also been said that the committee is free to decide how it's going to proceed. Therefore, in that regard, I have to support my opposition colleagues.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachand.

[*English*]

Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): I would like to say that if this has been done before in committee, as obviously it has, and there were no legal ramifications to it the first time or the second time or the third time, I see no reason why there would be legal ramifications to it this time. So I would consider that to be an obstacle in the way of this committee to move forward with the job it has at hand, which is a very important job.

I would also like to point out that in my mind it is highly doubtful that other members on the government side of committee would refrain from having discussions with the parliamentary secretary about what takes place, unless of course it's in camera and they're not allowed to do so. So I don't believe the parliamentary secretary's job will be made more difficult. I don't think this is actually doing anything negative toward the parliamentary secretary.

It's the wish of this committee to move forward with the agenda we have, a very important agenda for defence. I'd like to stop wasting time, I guess, Mr. Chairman, and move forward.

The Chair: I think we all would, but I have some speakers, and I'm going to give them all an opportunity. We will move forward, hopefully in the near future.

Mr. Bagnell and then Mr. Blaikie.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman. I don't want to stop the debate, but my understanding is that the motion to table is not debatable. Perhaps we could quickly vote on that and then go back, because I do want to say something on the debate about the parliamentary secretary.

The Chair: You're quite right, except I didn't receive a motion to table. We already have a motion on the floor. The only interruption that takes precedence when you have a motion on the table is a point of order. So I will entertain someone's motion in due course, but it's not been received yet, because it would be improper to receive it.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay. I'll speak to the motion, then, not the tabling.

I've no illusion that this will pass and the parliamentary secretary will be excluded, but I just want to put it on the record that I've always been opposed to that. Committees are always very non-partisan. Most committees work very well, cooperatively, just to get the work done. My understanding of that subcommittee is that it's to help speed things up so we don't all have to be there and we can set an agenda and everything.

A parliamentary secretary is the first one privy to some of the mandatory things—the legislation coming up, the things that may need to go on that agenda. Of course, it all comes back to the main committee anyways. To me, when we have information available and it's not at the subcommittee and we have to wait until it comes back to the main committee, then we're just kind of wasting everyone's time to get the same things on the agenda anyway. It's sort of partisan, then, excluding him with no positive function. I've always had that position, but I don't want to make a big deal of it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Blaikie is our last speaker, and then we'll move forward.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Chairman, I just want to emphasize that although it may seem like it, this is not a partisan issue. This is a parliamentary issue. It's not a question of rights, it's a question of policy. As far back as the McGrath committee, the Special Committee on the Reform of the House of Commons, there was a recommendation made by that committee that parliamentary secretaries not sit on committees. That recommendation was adopted by the House of Commons in 1985 or 1986. That was in place for three or four years until such time as it was changed.

No one suggested at that time that it was a violation of the parliamentary rights of parliamentary secretaries that they couldn't sit on committees, because they saw that this wasn't a matter of rights at all. This was a matter of policy. So we have a matter of policy before us.

I still think that the member's point of order is out of order in itself. He's objecting to a motion that isn't yet on the floor, which is the motion to recommend his removal from the committee. This only has to do with the subcommittee on agenda. I think the member would have been well advised to have waited, because now he's really confused things and made things all the worse.

If the subcommittee on agenda needs to know what the government's agenda is, it's not as if there aren't members of the government on the committee. If we have a chairman who is doing his job, as I'm sure we will, and others, then we will know. Information will be in abundance. What we don't want in abundance is the undue influence that a parliamentary secretary can wield, especially on a subcommittee on agenda, but also, for that matter, on the committee as a whole.

I would recommend that we proceed to a vote on my original motion.

•(1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

There's one other speaker. I'm going to give that person a chance in a second. I just want to be clear that Mr. Bagnell raised a point of order. The chair has to receive any point of order. He can rule that it's not. Mr. Bagnell disposed of it really quickly. So we move on.

I misinformed the committee when I said that the whips had all agreed, but apparently...or not just apparently, as I'm informed by the clerk, there was unanimous consent in the House to accept the committee membership as it was presented in the House. This is just for our future discussion in terms of where I think this is going. The defence committee was as we have it now. That was unanimously accepted in the House.

What we're talking to now, and I have one more speaker, is Mr. Blaikie's motion, seconded by Mr. Casson, to delete the parliamentary secretary from the subcommittee on agenda and procedure and to replace the parliamentary secretary with another member of the government party. We're talking to that, and that alone, at this point. Maybe we can wrap this up and move forward.

Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin: I just want to assure Mr. Blaikie, if he feels any consternation, that I'm well aware of the motion we're talking about.

Everybody on this committee wants to work hard for our military and wants to do our best, and this committee's best, to make sure that we serve the men and women in uniform to the best of our ability, and come up with good solutions, come up with effective policies and ideas that will enable us to strengthen our armed forces. That, I think, is the beginning and the end of what we are going to do.

Nobody on the subcommittee, no one person, is going to direct that subcommittee or have undue power. There are at least four people who are going to be on that. Certainly one individual will not have that power, quite obviously. However, I'd like you to perhaps think about—through you, Mr. Chair, to the opposition members—the fact that I do have information, that I do receive briefings, and that I am privy to a lot of information about what goes on in the department. I would see my role on that subcommittee as being a useful, constructive element to help serve and advise in any way possible our men and women in uniform. It would be useful, I think, for the subcommittee to be privy to that information. I see my role as a PS as being useful to that subcommittee to fulfill the larger objectives of this committee.

So if a subcommittee wants to go off and not have access to that information, not have access to that direction, not be aware of where the defence department wants to go, then that is up to them, if they so choose. I just want to be useful on that subcommittee. At the end of the day, of course, it's what the majority wishes to do.

The Chair: Let's see what the majority wants to do. We'll vote on Mr. Blaikie's motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll proceed accordingly.

Now I need a motion to receive and publish evidence in the absence of a quorum.

Hon. Judi Longfield: I so move.

The Chair: Seconded by Mr. Bagnell.

Speaking to it, Mrs. Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield: Can I make an amendment as I speak to it?

The Chair: Sure, a friendly amendment.

Hon. Judi Longfield: Given the way it is here, Mr. Chair, I could see a time when one of the vice-chairs was sitting in the chair, and a meeting to receive and publish could be held without a member of the government side being there. I don't think that was the intent, to exclude anyone. That's why we've added "including one member of the opposition", and I would also include that it be one member from the government side as well.

I know that as it looks here, the chair is the government member. However, if a vice-chair were chairing, that would not be the case.

•(1600)

The Chair: Can we consider that a friendly amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

The Chair: The next motion concerns time limits for witness statements and questioning, as you see it in front of you.

Mr. Casson.

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if I could offer a slight modification of what has been presented. As far as the rotation is concerned during questioning, perhaps during the first round of seven minutes each, we could go Conservative, Bloc, NDP, Liberal. After that, for the five-minute round, we could go Conservative, Liberal, Bloc, Liberal, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, and then repeat that second five-minute phase. I think that would give a representation as to the weight of the members on the committee and would give everybody a chance to get into the question and answer part of the meeting.

The Chair: As I understood it, what's in writing is essentially the way the committee proceeded in the last session, when I chaired it before. How does what you just described differ from what's in writing?

Mr. Rick Casson: What's suggested is to alternate between the government and the opposition parties.

The Chair: In the seven-minute round?

Mr. Rick Casson: No, in the five-minute round.

The Chair: In the first round you do all the opposition, and then the government side.

Mr. Rick Casson: Yes. And because of the structure of the committee, the second round, the five-minute round, would go Conservative, Liberal, Bloc, Liberal, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative.

The Chair: Yes, alternating. Okay.

Moved by Mr. Casson, seconded by Mr. MacKenzie.

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

The Chair: We have to pay our witnesses' travel and living expenses. Can we have a motion to do that?

Moved by Mrs. Longfield, seconded by Mr. MacKenzie.

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

The Chair: The next motion concerns the distribution of documents with translation: that the clerk be authorized to distribute to the members of the committee documents only when they exist in both official languages.

Maybe you'll allow me a quick word on this. There have been situations in the past that we've probably all experienced at various committees, where witnesses came in and distributed to some members of the committee, or even to all members, documents in only one official language. I always had a problem with that, quite frankly. Unfortunately, I only speak one of our official languages, other than a limited amount of words in French. I feel that distribution should go through the clerk, and that's the intent here.

Essentially, that's what we had last time, Madam Clerk? That's how we operated?

Monsieur Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to move an amendment to the motion. I'll pass around a sheet with the wording of the amendment, the purpose of which is to prevent the very

situation you described from arising. I'll wait until the motion has been tabled, and then I'll move my amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Merci.

Could we have a motion on the distribution of documents with translation.

Hon. Keith Martin: We should see the amendment first.

Hon. Judi Longfield: Why don't we just skip to working meals and then come back to the other one.

The Chair: Yes, okay. Good idea, Judi.

We'll hold that in abeyance for a minute, Monsieur Bachand.

On 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.

She doesn't have to cook them herself or anything, although they probably would be very good if she did. This is for her to arrange meals when we want to work through mealtime.

An hon. member: So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1605)

The Chair: The next motion reads as follows: that, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to have one staff person present at in camera meetings.

I want to indicate to you, maybe with the help of our francophone colleagues, that there seems to be a difference here, and I think we should try to be consistent. The French seems to strongly imply that the MP be there as well as his or her assistant. The English doesn't say that. I think the committee might want to be clear on this. Do you want to be allowed to have a staff member present at an in camera meeting when you yourself are not there? Is that what the committee wants to do? Or is it that you be present along with a staff member, if you desire?

Monsieur Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chairman, I remind you that as far as the wording of the amendment is concerned, the French version has precedence over the English version.

Seriously though, the intent is to allow members to be accompanied by a staff member. In the past, we were told that no one other than MPs was allowed in the room for in camera meetings, even though MPs wanted their assistants to be present. That is in fact the aim of the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Can we be agreed that the intent of the committee is to say that a member of this committee may have up to one staff person in attendance with him or her during in camera meetings of this committee? Is that what our intention is?

Mr. O'Connor.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor (Carleton—Mississippi Mills, CPC): Maybe I misinterpreted, Mr. Chairman, but I understood in discussion that there are situations where members may not be available for the in camera session, and we would be allowed to leave one of our staff here so that they could monitor what went on.

The Chair: That's what I'm putting on the floor. That's what the English suggests. It's not what the French suggests, and Mr. Bachand has reinforced that. We need to have it say the same thing in both languages and to make our intention clear.

Mr. Blaikie.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Chairman, I probably have more at stake in this than anyone else, because every other party would have the option that if one person is away, there is another person there. But if I'm away for some reason, I would certainly prefer to be able to have a staff person present in an in camera setting, obviously with no voice or vote, but simply to be able to report to me what the committee decided on, what arguments were presented, etc.

The Chair: What I need now is a motion.

Mrs. Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield: I just want a clarification. I would think that you wouldn't want more staff than there are members sitting on the committee. You could have five substitutes with a staffer and all of the permanent members also having staff there, and I don't think that's what you intended. I can understand Mr. Blaikie's perspective if he's not here, because he's the single member from his party. But for other caucuses, if we all sent staff and then we all sent replacements and they brought staff, then....

The Chair: That concern has been noted.

Perhaps somebody could give me a motion we can speak to, and then we can decide what we want to do.

Mr. O'Connor, do you have a motion?

Mr. Gordon O'Connor: Yes. I move that during in camera sessions a member may have one assistant with him, and in the event that they aren't there, an assistant can be in attendance.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go back to the distribution of documents with translation. Have all members received Mr. Bachand's motion on the distribution of documents? It's in both official languages.

[Translation]

Go ahead, Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand: I don't wish to belabour the point raised earlier, Mr. Chairman, and I know that you're a competent Chair, but on occasion, some persons have wanted to hand out unilingual English documents. We objected to this and told them that they could not do that. Some ill-advised chairs would then tell the witnesses to leave copies of their documents on the corner of the table so that members could pick up a copy if they wished to do so. In my view, that's tantamount to flaunting the rules. I know that you're a good chair and that you would never act in this manner. However, I'd like this rule to be put in writing to ensure compliance with the spirit of the Official Languages Act. I hope the Clerk

understands that witnesses will need to be given advance notice of the requirement to have their documents translated. If we want to respect both French and English, we need to ensure that documents are available in both languages. Up until now, the rule has been disregarded far too often.

In my view, the proposed amendment would resolve this committee's dilemma once and for all.

• (1610)

[English]

The Chair: Merci beaucoup.

Mr. O'Connor seconds the motion.

Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin: I respect what Mr. Bachand is saying. I completely understand that. But all of us on this committee know there are times when witnesses are called on very short notice. They cannot get their documents translated in the period of time they've been asked to appear in front of this committee, and the translation can occur at some time thereafter. I don't know how this committee has operated in the past, but I hope the committee has the flexibility to allow individuals who are called on very short notice to provide their documents to us, and then at a later date the translation, be it French to English or English to French, can happen. So at least we can have the important information they are providing to us.

The Chair: Since I've had the opportunity to chair the committee twice in the past, and again now—and I appreciate the opportunity—I can inform the new members and remind the veteran members that the committee has been very assiduous in insisting that documentation be available in both official languages at the same time, in keeping with the spirit of the rules.

Having said that, I can think of a couple of occasions...a little more on the English side, but I can recall an occasion where it was a francophone witness and a document *en français*. With unanimous consent of the committee, of course, the committee can basically set aside any of its rules. So with unanimous consent, if the committee is convinced there are extenuating circumstances that every member agrees with, it could then do what Mr. Martin proposes.

That's the flexibility I think you're seeking, but Mr. Bachand's motion simply formalizes in writing very clearly what this committee has insisted on for all the time I've sat on it, and many other committees as well.

Mr. Casson.

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Chairman, I think it does happen that witnesses come in, in a very short timeframe, but I believe the way this motion is worded the onus will be on the clerk: if these people who come in have documents to present, they have to be presented in both official languages. We certainly support that, taking note of the fact that you can do whatever you want with unanimous consent.

But I think in order to just absolutely clarify what already exists, we'll be supporting the motion Mr. Bachand has put forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I would just make one editorial comment, with your indulgence. Yes, we sometimes have witnesses on short notice, but we ought to try to give them proper lead time so they can live up to this rule. Sometimes we put our witnesses in an untenable situation, and maybe we have to be a little more careful to allow that proper amount of time. So I strongly support this as well.

Could I have a motion for in camera meeting transcripts? Mr. Casson, seconded by Mr. O'Connor.

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

The Chair: On the subcommittee, because we have some new members, I'll give a quick comment on some of these things—and I'll try to be brief. We've had a subcommittee on veterans affairs in the past. In the past it had five government members and four opposition members. The clerk, I think wisely, has left out the numbers now because of the new realities numerically that we face following last June 28. So you see it in front of you with no numbers. Who wants to put some numbers in?

Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move that there be a subcommittee established for veterans affairs and that it be composed of seven members or associate members, of which three shall be government members and four shall be the opposition members, with all parties represented. That breakdown would be two Conservatives, one Bloc Québécois, and one NDP on the opposition side.

•(1615)

The Chair: Thank you.

You've heard the motion. Mr. O'Connor seconds it.

Mrs. Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield: I don't mean to be unduly picky. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, in conjunction with all parties, had proposed a committee schedule so that when committees were meeting, all members knew when they were meeting and there wouldn't be two that you were on meeting at the same time.

One of the addendums to that proposal for committee schedules was that a subcommittee could meet at a time normally reserved for its full committee if the said committee was not meeting. If the obligations that were imposed as a result of all-party agreement for the meeting of committee chairs...that could mean that this veterans affairs thing would never meet, because the agreed upon schedule by all House whips and leaders, and concurred in by Procedure and House Affairs, says that it can only meet at a time when a main committee is scheduled. So I think we need to look at this. It's not our intent that we establish a committee that will never meet. I would suspect that this committee is going to use its full allotment of times under the proposed schedule.

The Chair: I'd like to ask the clerk to comment on that. I don't recall there being a problem with this last session. We certainly had an active veterans affairs subcommittee.

Madam Clerk, do you have any comments?

The Clerk of the Committee: Just that usually the subcommittees meet from 5:30 to 7:30, at which time there are no regular meetings scheduled for committees.

Hon. Judi Longfield: I guess I would like to have that clarified in this one, because as it stands now, it says "at a time when the main committee is not sitting"; but then if you put it together with what sits over the top of that, it would mean that it could only meet if the main committee wasn't meeting. I know that's not the intention.

Perhaps we could say that it will meet between 5:30 and 7:30 or something of that nature, but the way it is now, it's in violation of what the schedule permits.

The Chair: Let's go back to Mrs. Hinton and see if she has any suggestions.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My intent today was to fill in the numbers. I would like to have the opportunity to discuss with all members of the committee how they would like to proceed. My personal preference would be that we do not shuffle veterans affairs off to the side. I don't want to see that happen.

What I would like to see happen is that there be a firm commitment that there will be a meeting; perhaps it will only be one day a week, but perhaps it will be two days a week. I would like that to follow one of the defence committee meetings. The only difficulty I've had in that is I have not yet had the opportunity to find out what rooms are available in what buildings.

I give you my assurance, I share your concern. I want to make certain that there are in fact regularly scheduled meetings.

Hon. Judi Longfield: Perhaps, then, to facilitate that, we take it out, right after "subcommittees be empowered to send for persons, papers and records to receive evidence", and just leave it at that. Then when the committee will sit will be up to the committee, and we'll ensure that if it needs to meet three times, as long as it's not meeting...there's no conflict.

Would that help you, Betty? When and how often would be....

The Chair: I would note, in case there is any misunderstanding, in the last line and a half it says "during the time when the main committee is not sitting", that main committee being SCONDVA. That's the interpretation we have here.

Hon. Judi Longfield: I appreciate that, but at the same time, the procedure and house affairs committee has said that a subcommittee shall meet at a time normally reserved for its full committee. It doesn't say it can meet at another time.

The Chair: "Normally reserved for its full committee"—well, we do that.

Hon. Judi Longfield: That's why I'm saying if we take out that whole part at the end, we're not in conflict with any other. The subcommittee can then come to a meeting time that suits its purposes.

The Chair: Mrs. Longfield probably has a point on timing. Do we want to agree to delete that issue of timing and deal with membership now?

Mrs. Hinton.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: If that makes the member comfortable, I could do that. It's just that my actual level of comfort would be much higher if we dealt with the issue of the numbers right now, and if you would give me the opportunity, say to the end of this week, to speak to everyone and see what we can do.

The Chair: Good suggestion. Let's deal with the composition of the committee as moved by Mrs. Hinton, save and except for the issue of timing.

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

• (1620)

The Chair: And the issue of timing is to be considered by the committee a week from today.

Various committees, as we all know, have operated under different procedures. This particular standing committee has operated on a 24-hour notice period for motions. It has been understood "written notice". I don't know if we want to formalize that and say that we ask that it be a 24-hour written notice. That's the way we've operated.

Some operate under 48 hours. I'm in the hands of the committee. Previous procedure has been a 24-hour notice. It has to be in writing to the clerk, anyway. Can I have a mover to this?

Mr. Casson.

Mr. Rick Casson: Do you want the motion moved with the word "written" added in there, just to clarify that?

The Chair: I'd suggest it might clarify it, Rick, yes.

Mr. Rick Casson: So if we say that except for amendments to bills, a 24-hour written notice be given.... I so move that as amended.

The Chair: Okay, moved by Mr. Casson, seconded by Monsieur Perron. Merci.

A question, Mr. Boshcoff.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River): One point, Mr. Chair. Do you not usually put something about the weekends and stuff like that in here as a provision?

The Chair: (Motion agreed to)

The Chair: That clears up our routine motions, and I know that's what everybody was here to listen to with great interest. It wasn't quite as simple as we thought, but we've made some progress.

We've had proper written notice of motion from Mr. Blaikie, and I now want to give him an opportunity to speak to his substantive motion.

Mr. Blaikie.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think the motion is self-explanatory. We did have a preliminary discussion about this at our earlier meeting, even though we couldn't formally deal with it. I think there is a role for this committee in asking some of the questions that need to be asked about the Department of National Defence purchase of the former Upholder-class submarines.

I understand that a military board of inquiry is in process, but I also understand from experience that its terms of reference do not

include some of the things that I think Canadians want some answers on, if indeed there are answers, including the procurement process, the purchase itself, what the government may have known or should have known, and what precautions or procedures it put in place in order to deal with what it did know, these kinds of things.

Of course, this is relevant to the ongoing back-and-forth debate between Canada and the U.K. about who might ultimately be held responsible, if in fact what is found to have been wrong with the *Chicoutimi* is a pre-existing condition, if you like, and not something caused by something that was actually done after the *Chicoutimi* put to sea. So there are a lot of unanswered questions.

But I think there is a role for a parliamentary committee in this, and I detect a consensus among members about this. I move this motion with the understanding that if it passes, the subcommittee on agenda and procedure would get together and try to draw up a plan for who we would want to hear from.

I move it also with the understanding that this need not be the only thing the committee does. This doesn't have to be done to the exclusion of everything else. We have things coming up that we will want to talk about. We don't know yet what will be expected of us in terms of a process that might precede a vote on national missile defence. I know that this committee did look at it briefly at one point and did hear from some witnesses, but I also understand from people who were there that although the chairman might have been there, very few people on the government side were present. Now that we will have a vote in the House on this and a new democracy is breaking out everywhere, it may be that there would be some usefulness in having further hearings of the committee. Also, at some point the committee may wish to be involved in responding to the government's international policy review paper, whenever that comes out.

I'm trying to answer, Mr. Chairman, some of the concerns that were raised that this might preoccupy the committee. This only needs to preoccupy the committee as much as the committee wants to be preoccupied with it.

I would suggest that at least in the initial stages of our work program we do hear some witnesses, obviously the minister, people from the navy, and others who may be able to provide helpful comment or testimony. If this motion passes, I would like to see the subcommittee on agenda and procedure get together and draw up a work plan for how we can hear from the people who can help us understand what it is we need to know about this.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

You have the motion in front of you, and you've heard the comments.

Mr. Casson seconds the motion.

As speakers to the motion, I have on my list Ms. Longfield and Mr. Bachand.

Hon. Judi Longfield: Initially I was just trying to catch your attention because I had a point of order about how far this was going.

I fully support the motion that the committee should examine the procurement process, and I just wanted to put that on the record.

As far as the rest of the agenda items are concerned, I think we need to deal with those. I agree with a number of them.

But I agree that we should begin the hearings on the procurement process.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Naturally, Mr. Chairman, I support this proposed amendment. So far, all we have is a technical enquiry conducted by the Canadian Navy. I don't wish to get into a debate over the independent enquiry that we're calling for, but for the moment, the Navy's enquiry will be confined to determining the causes of the fire and so forth. It will be very technical in nature.

I believe that it's very important for the public that we review this matter from a political perspective, because we represent the public. We need to address such issues as whether or not the acquisition of these submarines was justified at the time. Was a contract negotiated? What were the terms of the contract? What was the relationship between the Minister and the Navy? We've been asking the Minister questions from the very beginning and the answer we always get from him is to quote the Navy's position and to tell us what steps it plans to take. We need to look into the whole question of political accountability. Why did the government purchase the submarines in the first place? The reason we often hear for the purchase is concern for safeguarding Canada's sovereignty, particular over the Arctic. I know for a fact that these submarines are not equipped with an air-independent propulsion system. Therefore, they cannot navigate under the polar ice cap.

We run the risk of not getting answers to many questions if the committee does not carry out its own study. I agree that the subcommittee could discuss the matter further to set out the parameters of the study. However, I think it's critically important that we proceed with our own study at this point in time.

[*English*]

The Chair: Merci, Monsieur Bachand.

Mr. O'Connor.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Chairman, I support the idea of a parliamentary investigation of the submarine situation.

As others have said, the navy is conducting a technical inquiry now as to the cause of the fire. That's the appropriate role for them. But I think it's our function as parliamentarians to go back to the government and start tracing all of the procurement decisions that were made from the start, plus any political decisions, to find out why they required submarines. When they decided on the used submarines, what did they do? What were the decisions? What were their plans? What did they expect?

We are now being told that it will take a total of ten years to bring these submarines into service from the time the process started, which seems extraordinary. I would like to know why it takes ten

years. I think we can get at the root of it by looking at the procurement system.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Are there other speakers?

(Motion agreed to)

● (1630)

The Chair: It is carried unanimously that this committee will carry out the spirit of Mr. Blaikie's motion, and investigate the purchase of the four Upholder-class submarines.

We have a couple of other items. I agree with Mr. Blaikie that the steering committee, the subcommittee on procedure, will want to meet as soon as possible. I would suggest tomorrow, if members are available. We could discuss that, find a convenient time.

With your indulgence, perhaps I'll just indicate a couple of things we're going to want to look at. Obviously, members will want to start to consider possible witnesses they might suggest. I think we would want to ask our researchers to assist us in that regard with suggestions as well.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: We could decide on starting with the minister.

The Chair: We could decide on starting with the minister. The minister has been a witness here before and will be again.

We need to decide the parameters of the study, obviously. I think that one of the obvious questions we're going to want to think about and reflect on quickly is staff resources. Will we have enough research resources with our two good researchers? Is there a possibility we would need some outside consultants? Would we want to possibly request additional staff resources through the Library of Parliament?

I want to relay to the committee that the suggestion was made to the committee by the minister's staff that they want to assist. In fact we proceed with this—which was obvious we would, given the informal discussions we've had—the minister wants to assist in any way.

If the committee is interested in travelling to Halifax for a briefing on site, to actually inspect one of these subs—not that we have any expertise, but if we're going to investigate the program, do we want to actually see the beast, if I can call it that, in front of us, and have a briefing on site?

These are some initial considerations the committee might want to reflect on.

Can we have a steering committee? I'm available tomorrow for a subcommittee meeting. Who are the other members? Mr. Casson? Who else?

Monsieur Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand: What time?

The Chair: We have to find a convenient time for everybody.

Mr. Blaikie?

Hon. Bill Blaikie: It's a problem for me, but we'll work it out.

The Chair: Okay.

Can I say we'll meet tomorrow as a subcommittee to start to move forward with the study and lay out the game plan for the study? Maybe we can decide on a time after this meeting.

All right. Thank you very much.

Now, there are several new members on the committee and I want to indicate that of course DND is quite prepared to have a briefing and a tour for any new members. Can I get an expression of interest? Some of us can probably give the tour and the briefing. Judi Longfield could, I know that.

How many members here would like to avail themselves of a tour and a briefing at DND? Can I just have a show of hands? I see four or five members. The clerk will set that up. Obviously, returning members are welcome as well.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor: Will I be able to bring my staff?

The Chair: Yes, your staff are certainly welcome to go as well.

On main estimates, Mr. Martin, did you want to...?

Hon. Keith Martin: A point of order on the subcommittee, Mr. Chair. If I'm being excluded, then a member of the government should be on instead of me.

The Chair: Right, yes.

Hon. Keith Martin: So the chair, two vice-chairs...it shouldn't be Mr. Blaikie; it should be somebody from our side.

The Chair: The motion was to substitute a government member for yourself.

Hon. Keith Martin: You will substitute a government member and it won't be Mr. Blaikie.

The Chair: No, no. Mr. Blaikie is a member because he's representing his own party.

Hon. Keith Martin: Okay. We'll place somebody else.

The Chair: Yes, there will be another member. Thank you.

On the main estimates, which I know the committee will be anxious to meet with the minister on, how does next week strike the committee for meeting with the minister? I asked him about his time just briefly and he said he would try to make all the time available necessary next week for the committee.

Can you speak to that, Mr. Martin?

Hon. Keith Martin: I can. Next week is very, very difficult for him. The week after that is better. Any time after next week is a lot better for him. The minister is more than happy to come. If we can do this at the earliest the first week of November, that would help.

•(1635)

The Chair: Mrs. Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield: Mr. Chair, I don't think we should forget that there's the Minister of Veterans Affairs. This one just refers to "the minister", as opposed to "ministers".

The Chair: That's a very good point. There are two ministers.

Mr. Blaikie, a point of order?

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Chairman, I have to leave, but I want to clarify one thing. I thought that at the last meeting I had given notice of a motion with respect to the membership of the parliamentary secretary on the committee as a whole. I don't see it reflected here and that's fine. I would like to give that notice again, that at the next meeting of the committee I will move a motion with respect to the membership of the parliamentary secretary on the committee. Having given that notice, I now have to go, but I just wanted to make that—

The Chair: Okay. You might want to just quickly hear the clerk's comments, Bill, before you go.

The Clerk: The membership of the committee is not within the mandate of the committee, so a motion to remove a member from the committee is not a motion that's receivable.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Just on that point of order, we went through this before. My motion will have to do with a recommendation to the government as to who it puts on the committee. That's completely in order. This committee can recommend anything it likes to the government. We don't have the power to remove the parliamentary secretary. We do have the power to recommend to the government that it remove the parliamentary secretary. That's what we did the last time. The government didn't pay any attention. Maybe they won't pay any attention this time, but maybe it will start to happen right across the board in all kinds of committees, Mr. Chairman. Who knows? I wouldn't know. I wouldn't suggest that there might be an epidemic of this, but in any event, in a minority Parliament the government might be less likely to just ignore the will of a committee on this.

That will be my motion and that will be in order.

The Chair: Thank you. We appreciate the clarification, Mr. Blaikie. If you could give the clerk 24 hours, I assure you we'll deal with your motion first thing at Wednesday's meeting.

Mr. Casson.

Mr. Rick Casson: I would just like to make a comment on the parliamentary secretary's reference to the minister being busy next week.

You indicated that he indicated to you he would make himself available at any time. Of course, I defer to the parliamentary secretary. He should know what the minister is up to more than we. However, I believe that next week would be ideal to have the minister here, and if there is a half a day or whatever that he is available, then I think we should explore that option.

The Chair: We can do that. If I said that, I misspoke. He indicated that the next few days are pretty tough for him, and he asked if we would indulge him and give him a bit of time to deal with some scheduling problems. When he comes here, he doesn't want to shirk. He wants to really be here and be accessible to the committee. That's what I meant to say. I think maybe Mr. Martin said it better.

So the minister will be with us in the first week of November.

I asked the clerk to add this item, the 60th anniversary of VE Day. I hope this is wrong, but I want to alert the members. This has been brought to my attention by a former colleague of ours, who I'm sure you'll recall, a dedicated member of this committee and a former Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, John O'Reilly, who was quite involved in the establishment of the Juno memorial, along with Mr. Garth Webb and many others. It has come to my attention that so far there doesn't seem to be any plan to have a proper veterans delegation at the 60th anniversary celebrations of VE Day. I wouldn't think we would want to have that situation occur. We'll have to ask the minister about that. I just wanted to alert members and to see if you had heard the same thing. When I heard it, it certainly concerned me a lot.

Mr. Boshcoff.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm an honorary president of one of the legions, and they have already started lobbying across the country in terms of what Canada's response will be. So I'm sure that just about everybody is going to have correspondence regarding this matter. It doesn't seem that we have much on the books, so the motion here by the committee is very timely.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield: May I suggest that the chair, on behalf of the committee, write to the minister immediately indicating that we do want to see some government involvement and asking that he get back to us with suggestions.

The Chair: Including participation by our veterans.

Hon. Judi Longfield: Or that we put out a call to people. But we should send an official letter.

The Chair: It's moved that the chair, on behalf of the committee, make representations to the minister and express concerns.

Mr. Bachand seconds the motion.

Mr. Casson.

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Chairman, we went through this same type of issue with the D-Day celebrations. I think it's important that we get the real solid breakdown on what the government has planned, including how many people, who will be attending, and what the ratio is to veterans. We understand fully that to take veterans to one of these is a pretty complex issue, with most of them being up in years. In the last Parliament we had to specify what was being spent, who was going, how many veterans were going, and what support people would be there for them. So perhaps we could expand your letter in order to get a detailed explanation of what's happening.

The Chair: We're going to want to have the Minister of Veterans Affairs here on estimates, as Ms. Longfield noted. I would ask the clerk to indicate in the letter to the minister that we're going to want to discuss this concern when the minister is here on estimates. Then we'll have a chance to find out exactly what the plans are, what stage they're at, and so on. Is that agreeable?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. O'Connor.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor: Just for my own edification, is there an intention to move people to Europe for this celebration? World War II technically ended somewhere in northern Germany, with the surrender to the allied armies and air forces. Is that what they're going to do?

The Chair: That's a good question. These are the kinds of questions we're going to want to ask the minister. But certainly for anything that is done to recognize the end of the war in Europe, we are going to want to have an appropriate representation of veterans.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor: In August are we going to do victory in Japan? We had forces in the Pacific too.

The Chair: Yes. You're asking good rhetorical questions, which I know you'll ask of the minister when the minister is here.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll write said letter. Anything else?

The clerk will inquire about getting the Minister of Veterans Affairs here in the near future, as schedule allows.

I think that's just about everything.

There has been an incredible amount of interest from the media to be allowed to cover the meetings that we would have on the submarine program, which is natural; one would understand that. I guess I'm in the hands of the committee. It would be our intention to try to make these meetings as public as possible for the Canadian people and the Canadian media, so we would meet in a televised room whenever possible.

When that's not possible, if the committee decided, it could allow gavel-to-gavel coverage by any of the media. In other words, for new members, that means that if station X wants to come in and cover, have its camera running for this committee, it comes in at the start of the meeting with the gavel and it doesn't start walking out part-way through; it stays till the end and it stays fixed on the person speaking. That has been the agreed process in the past.

What also happens is if we're televised on CPAC, then of course the various news outlets can pick up what they want from the CPAC coverage.

I just want to let you know there has been a huge interest expressed to me and to the clerk, probably to many of you as members, in making sure these meetings are as open and accessible as possible.

Mr. Casson.

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure who makes the decision as to which meeting gets televised and which doesn't, but I think a plea should go from this committee to whoever those powers be that this committee, indeed for the reasons you've stated, has to be a very public and open process—the more so, the better. We certainly support the fact that each meeting should be televised so that Canadians can see what's happening.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacKenzie.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Chair, being brand new to this, I'd just like some information so that I can pass it on to my member of the agenda committee. What authority do we have to ask foreign folks to come to these hearings? Do we have any...?

The Chair: Can you define "folks" for me? Who do you mean? An ambassador?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: No. There may very well be people from Great Britain or other countries who have had some dealings.

The Chair: My understanding is a standing committee of the House of Commons can invite anybody it wants to appear. I'll stand corrected by the clerk, but my understanding is also that any Canadian citizen can, if necessary, be subpoenaed to appear.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I understand the Canadian part.

The Chair: Right. So we can invite anybody.

An hon. member: The high commissioner came once.

The Chair: In fact we've had military personnel from various countries at this committee. We've had experts from.... Mr. Blaikie mentioned missile defence. I remember the Russian military expert sitting here and telling us that given time, the Russians would agree to the setting aside of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which of course he was quite right in saying.

So we can invite them, Dave.

Mrs. Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield: This might help, Dave. We're really only restricted by the amount of money that we have to spend. Any study that's undertaken by any parliamentary committee goes to the liaison committee of Parliament, and the budgets are approved or denied. Generally speaking, you're masters of your own destiny in terms of who you invite.

The Chair: Okay, thank you very much.

Anything else?

We'll just close with two things. The clerk will establish a time for the tour and briefing at DND. It's open to all members, of course. And the steering subcommittee, or the subcommittee on procedure and agenda, will meet tomorrow. Do you want to do it now? What's a good time tomorrow? I'd better check my own schedule here.

The Chair: How does 11 o'clock tomorrow morning sound?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right, that's what we'll do. We'll meet in our regular room.

That's it. Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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