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—
Chair

Ms. Bonnie Brown

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•(1310)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee: Honourable members of the subcommittee, I see a quorum.

Pursuant to the standing orders, your first item of business is to elect a chair of the subcommittee. I'm ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Anders.

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): I nominate John Williams because he's such a great guy.

The Clerk: Mr. Anders nominates Mr. Williams.

Monsieur St. Amand.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): I wish to nominate Bonnie Brown.

The Clerk: Mr. St. Amand nominates Ms. Bonnie Brown.

Are there other nominations?

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): I move the nominations closed.

The Clerk: Mr. Steckle moves that nominations be closed. All agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: Therefore, pursuant to standing orders, we'll be proceeding to a secret ballot.

Mr. Rob Anders: I would have said you're a great guy too, Bonnie, but....

The Clerk: Honourable members, I declare Bonnie Brown to have received a majority of the votes and to be duly elected chair of the subcommittee.

•(1315)

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): I'm sure it must have been close, Mr. Clerk, right?

The Clerk: The next item of business is the election of a vice-chair of the subcommittee.

[Translation]

I am ready to accept motions to this effect.

[English]

Mr. Anders.

Mr. Rob Anders: I nominate Mr. Williams because he's still a great guy and because he offered his name up for the chairmanship, and by golly, he deserves something.

The Clerk: Mr. Anders names Mr. Williams.

Ms. Catterall.

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): I nominate Mr. Wappel, who is vice-chair of the main committee.

The Clerk: Ms. Catterall nominates Mr. Wappel.

Are there other nominations?

Mr. John Williams: On a point of order, don't you have to be here to accept your nomination?

The Clerk: No.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): We discussed it last week when you were absent.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Any other nominations?

[English]

Mr. John Cannis: As a point of clarification, if I may, to Mr. Williams, with respect, he was absent for the last meeting. It was discussed at the last meeting when Mr. Anders was here, and we all agreed that we were going to pursue this election.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Any other nominations?

[English]

Are there other nominations? The nominations are closed, then.

I declare Mr. Tom Wappel duly elected vice-chair of the subcommittee.

I do now call upon Ms. Brown to come and take the chair.

The Chair (Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.)): Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

It's my pleasure to move to item three on the agenda, which is the financial report.

Mr. John Williams: I'd like to congratulate you, Ms. Brown, on your election as chair. You've done a fabulous job in the past and we know you're going to do a great job from here on in.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now ask the clerk to take us through the financial report, which you'll find on page 2 of your agenda. We skimmed over this quickly at the first meeting of the Liaison Committee, but I think it's good that the budget subcommittee members have a very clear picture of what's happening.

The Clerk: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The report has been much simplified as a result of the Board of Internal Economy adopting the recommendations of the Liaison Committee to modify the way the global envelope is allocated in each of the three periods. At the committee's recommendation, the envelope was divided: \$2 million for April to August, \$2 million from September to December, and \$1 million from January to March.

The first table provides a global summary on the \$5-million envelope, so from that there is still \$2 million left to allocate for the next two periods.

The second table focuses on the April to December period, which is \$2 million plus \$2 million, totalling \$4 million that's available.

In terms of expenditures that have been incurred and processed, there's \$939,000.

In terms of budgets allocated to the various committees but not yet fully expended, it's \$1.38 million of potential expenses.

Of the travel budgets that were approved but are awaiting travel authorization from the House, there's \$620,000.

That leaves for allocation, between now and the end of December, essentially \$1 million.

The last table is the temporary fund for expert services. It's a \$1-million fund that is available to the Liaison Committee until December 2006. Again, it's the same breakdown: expenses incurred and processed, \$44,000; potential expenditures, another \$158,000. So there is still available for allocation \$797,000, and we have budget requests today totalling \$31,220.

• (1320)

The Chair: Thank you very much. Are there any questions about the financial report?

Seeing none, I'll move to item four, the budget request from public accounts. To refresh your memories, I remind you this came before the full Liaison Committee, and there were some questions raised. It was suggested that it be referred to the budget subcommittee and that Mr. Walsh come to brief us on the discussions he had with the public accounts committee so that we would all be fully apprised.

I'd now invite Mr. Walsh to come to the table.

Mr. Rob Walsh (Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, House of Commons): Thank you, Madam Chairman. Did you wish me to summarize or recount what took place with the public accounts committee, or did you want to go with other discussions first?

The Chair: We want your legal opinion of the request that's been made for the purpose that it's been made. Questions were raised around the implications it might have on certain individuals and their

upcoming court cases—at least that was one angle of it, as I remember. There could have been others that I'm forgetting.

I'm sure you've thought this through in trying to guide the public accounts committee; if you could share your wisdom with us, we'd be pleased.

Mr. Rob Walsh: I'll share what I have. I don't know that it constitutes wisdom, but I'll share what I have.

The public accounts committee, like other committees, is concerned from time to time about testimony it may be hearing and how it may impact on other proceedings that are going on, particularly when the witness before the committee is himself or herself subject to proceedings in the courts. That is the case here, where one of the two persons who are facing court proceedings was a witness—I believe only one of the two—before the committee. Perhaps both were; my memory is failing. But certainly that's a concern of the committee.

The question today is whether what the committee is contemplating by way of reviewing the testimony of witnesses would put at risk the process. That's a judgment call, obviously. I believe the trials in question are scheduled for next May, although other events could intervene to cause them to be delayed further than that. But I think they're currently scheduled for May, if I'm not mistaken.

You may recall that there was some concern on the part of those parties that the Gomery report itself, coming out as it has now done, would present a threat to those trials, and it was found that it would not do so. So personally, my own judgment is that what this committee may be up to in all likelihood would not be seen as presenting a threat, if you like, to those proceedings.

Having said that, what is this committee seeking to do? Obviously it's wanting to review testimony of witnesses who appeared before the committee, comparing testimony the same persons might have given elsewhere under oath. The purpose here, as I understand it from my discussions with the committee, is to determine whether in fact any, or some, or—God forbid—all of the witnesses before the committee were untruthful in their testimony or, what's more likely the case in my view, less than fully truthful in their answers to the questions put to them.

What the committee will do with what this survey produces, I can't say. Mr. Williams, the chair of the committee, is here; he can perhaps speak to that.

But there is a range of things, Madam Chair, that could apply here. People often think in terms of trying to prove someone lied and trying to establish that they were perjurious in front of the committee, for which purpose a charge might be laid in the courts against such witnesses for having perjured themselves before a parliamentary committee. That's the extreme, but there are many steps or impacts that could arise short of that.

That issue of perjury—proving in a court of law that someone lied—is a difficult thing to prove, even on a clear day. It's one of those things that, for evidentiary purposes, is simply hard to show: that the person accused of lying knew that what he was saying at the time he said it was untrue and intentionally, under oath, uttered an untruth. It simply is not easy to prove. There are usually a number of ways you could qualify what was said in the circumstances so as to indicate that perhaps it wasn't entirely clear to the person speaking that what he or she was saying was untrue.

But then there is also a question of misleading. There's a criminal offence of misleading a court or a committee; that is to say, leaving a committee, to put it very simply, with a misunderstanding; knowing the committee was not understanding a situation correctly from one's own testimony and not correcting the situation, but in fact intentionally leaving the committee to be misled. That's another form of criminal offence, if you like.

But then, short of all of that, there is the possibility that the committee seeks simply to point out that some witnesses could have been more truthful and weren't, without going into any criminal question of charges. I guess I should say, Madam Chairman...and this is not unique to this committee. It happened with the agriculture committee, in my view, and it's happened with the government operations committee, and it happens in various committees from time to time; that is, trying to defend their function and maintain their credibility vis-à-vis witnesses who are appearing in front of the committee but, for a variety of reasons, might not want to be there and might not want to be fully forthcoming on the matter before the committee.

And so the committee needs to persuade the witness of his or her duty to be fully forthcoming with the committee. Part of that message needs the element of "What happens if I'm not? What are you going to do if I don't tell you the whole truth?"

●(1325)

Courts obviously have a very severe and quick remedy available to them in terms of contempt. That's something the courts administer themselves, and they can pull you in front of them very quickly if they find you were stringing them along, as it were. What does a committee do? I don't need to go into detail on that; I think members of this committee can readily understand the difficulties presented for parliamentary committees in respect to maintaining the credibility of their function.

In this case here, it may well be that this committee does a review of the evidence and finds that while it doesn't have a case against any witness for the severe charge of lying, not to mention a criminal process being laid, it may have a sound basis for commenting that a certain witness was less than fully truthful when he or she could have been, and did not meet the duty imposed upon any witness before a committee to be fully forthcoming, etc.

This judgment by the committee might well serve as a real deterrent, in my judgment, for other prospective witnesses who find themselves invited to a committee, so that they recognize that if they're not fully forthcoming to the committee, they could find their testimony reviewed and, indeed, a comment passed on how forthcoming or truthful they were with the committee. For many witnesses, obviously, that would be a very embarrassing thing to

happen. It ought to act as a deterrent to anyone thinking they can sort of string the committee along because all they have to do is stickhandle the five or eight minutes that one member has with his or her questions, and then it starts again with the next member. You don't have, as you do in a more formal and structured situation, one line of questioning that goes on and on until you get to the bottom of things. In a committee, you have several lines of questions, with the result that no one line of questioning is ever fully exhausted.

You know yourself, Madam Chairman, the more sophisticated persons coming before a committee develop techniques for avoiding full and complete answers to the questions that are being put, if only by understanding that all he has to do is wait for the next question. It has been my view that the witnesses are not entitled to answer only the questions that are put to them; they are there to provide the committee with all the information they have relevant to the matter that's before the committee, not simply sit back and wait for the right question, so that if the right question isn't asked, they don't have to give the testimony. In a perfect world, witnesses will answer and provide all the information and knowledge they have to a committee, whether or not the correct questions are asked.

In summary, Madam Chair, what I advise this committee is, step by step, if you want to look at the evidence, do so, but you're going to have to look at it at different levels. Are we talking about someone who is lying; are we talking about someone who misled; are we talking about someone who left the situation unclear and could have clarified it; are we talking about someone who didn't give information that we have reason to believe they had, because they gave the information later in another proceeding but didn't give it to our committee? There are gradations of untruthfulness, if you want to use that word, that may apply here, and until the review is done, it's hard to say to what extent what emerges from this will result in any later proceedings or action being taken by the committee.

●(1330)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now take questions to Mr. Walsh.

Mr. Williams.

Mr. John Williams: Yes, as chair of the public accounts committee, Madam Chair, I want to put on record, first of all, that this is not an investigation at this point in time as to who is lying and who committed perjury and so on. There's evidence on the public record from the public accounts committee, there's evidence on the public record from the Gomery inquiry, so it is to try to put that in some kind of comparative semblance so the committee can deliberate on what they want to do. As Mr. Walsh pointed out, there's a possibility of going down that road, or the committee could decide there's nothing really here that it wants to do anything about.

The key, of course, is that we have the information on a comparative basis—this is what was said here, this is what was said there, both on the public record—so we're not adding anything new; we're only forming the basis on where the public accounts would want to go. As you know, Madam Chair, each committee, being a master of its own destiny.... We've had many debates here about committees wanting to investigate this issue or that issue. We've had committees wanting to travel in order to compile a report on a particular issue of their choice, and this is no different from that.

The public accounts committee has decided that it would like to investigate the comparative public record and bring it to the committee so the committee, being master of its own destiny, can then, with the advice of our law clerk and others, decide what it wants to do from that point forward. I see this as a fairly simple thing that falls totally within the mandate of the committee, to gather some evidence, look at it, and then perhaps issue a report from there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williams.

Mr. Wappel.

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Colleagues, I'm sorry I was late. I had another steering committee meeting, and so I'm just here now.

Thank you, Mr. Walsh.

I personally have no problem whatsoever approving this request; however, neither Mr. Boudria nor Madam Catterall is here at the present time, and yet it was Mr. Boudria and Madam Catterall who asked some questions, so to be fair I'd just like to....

Have they been put, or should I ask them? Okay.

Mr. Boudria was concerned that the agreement between the committee and the witnesses—and in particular, I guess, Mr. Guité—has been respected in all respects and that the evidence that was formerly in camera and was made public was made public in accordance with the agreement between the witnesses and the committee. Is that correct?

Mr. Rob Walsh: I think Mr. Williams may need to answer that, as a matter of record.

Mr. John Williams: The agreement that was made at the time of the 2002 in camera meeting was that it would be made public two years or—it was made public in 2005—three years after the time, if there were no proceedings, and so on.

There were discussions between Mr. Guité and members of the governing party—the Liberal Party—on the public accounts committee, at which point in time Mr. Guité gave his authorization that the testimony he had given in private would be made public, and it was subsequently made public in 2004.

Mr. Tom Wappel: I believe your clerk told us it was by way of lawyer's letter. Is that correct?

Mr. John Williams: There were lawyers' letters, and there were also some discussions among the particular parties—Mr. Guité directly, with his lawyer present.

Mr. Tom Wappel: John, my concern is whether it's covered in writing somewhere.

Mr. John Williams: It's covered in writing and covered on the public accounts committee, yes. The clerk has the papers.

Mr. Tom Wappel: All right, good. So should someone come back to say the committee broke an agreement, you have that angle covered?

Mr. John Williams: We have that angle absolutely covered, and as I say, the matter is now on the public record, because Mr. Guité agreed to making it public, and of course for Mr. Tremblay, who is since deceased, the transcription was made public this past summer in accordance with the agreement.

• (1335)

Mr. Tom Wappel: Okay.

The second thing Ms. Catterall was concerned about was.... Of course, at the time all of this occurred, one presumes no one expected that the Guité trial would be postponed as long as it has been. Her concern was whether this study and anything that comes of it in some way would prejudice or could prejudice the Guité trial.

Mr. Walsh, I wonder if you could comment on that.

Mr. Rob Walsh: I answered this before you came in, Mr. Wappel. I can only reiterate, briefly, that it's a judgment call as to whether it would or not. I can only refer you to the same issue arising with regard to the Gomery report and its being disclosed, when the trials of Mr. Guité and Mr. Brault are scheduled for May. The judgment was taken that, no, the report will come out, and the trials are set for May.

My own view is that this exercise and whatever results come out from this exercise and are presumably reported to the committee some time in the new year likely, in my view—again, depending how this is handled—ought not to prejudice those proceedings. But it's a judgment call.

Mr. Tom Wappel: Madam Chair, given that the evidence is already public, presumably the Crown could be doing exactly what the committee wants to do now. The Crown could be poring through this public testimony right now in preparation for cross-examination of Mr. Guité at his trial.

Mr. Rob Walsh: No, the Crown cannot be looking at the testimony given by Mr. Guité to the parliamentary committee. We fought that issue in front of the Gomery commission itself, where a lawyer wanted to do just that, and we established the parliamentary principle that proceedings before a House committee cannot be used anywhere else, whether in a commission of inquiry or in court.

Mr. Tom Wappel: “Cannot be used”, granted—fair enough, I didn't know that—but certainly it wouldn't prevent the Crown from reading it.

Mr. Rob Walsh: They could read them, of course, yes.

Mr. Tom Wappel: And that, in whatever way, might prepare them for whatever they need to be prepared for.

Mr. Rob Walsh: Correct.

Mr. Tom Wappel: I think those are the two concerns, Madam Chair, as I recall them, that were expressed by Mr. Boudria and Madam Catterall. From my perspective, this is okay with me; I'm prepared to approve it.

The Chair: Mr. St. Amand.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Mr. Walsh, what is the precedent for this type of request by a standing committee, for—as I understand it—a service contract to, I suppose, compare and contrast competing or parallel testimonies? Has it ever been requested or approved before, to the best of your knowledge?

Mr. Rob Walsh: It seems to me there are two issues in your question. One is the means being adopted to do this, i.e., the process through this committee to get funding. Perhaps the clerk of this committee can advise you as to whether this sort of request has come to this committee—the Liaison Committee or the subcommittee—before now. I don't have a recollection of that, but then my memory is not that great. Perhaps the clerk could respond.

The Clerk: In terms of requests of this nature before the Liaison Committee, not to my knowledge. We've had other consultants, but not for this type of work.

Mr. Rob Walsh: The second part of your question was comparison of evidence. Have committees undertaken this before? I can't recall a time when it happened as we're contemplating it now. I'm not saying it didn't happen; it certainly has happened, in my experience, that committee chairs or committee members have said, what can we do about this, given this testimony we're getting and that we don't believe it's true?

There's a frustration sometimes on the part of committee members or committees when they feel they're not getting the whole story from a witness. And the question to me always is, what can we do? There's no black and white answer or easy answer to that question.

On this occasion this committee, it would appear, has decided to take the initial step of saying, let's examine the testimony and see if there's any basis for our thinking that we've been misled.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: All right, but as I understand it, stemming from Mr. Wappel's last question, Mr. Walsh, there is a precedent or an agreement, in this instance at least, or a judicial ruling that evidence given by a witness during the proceedings of the public accounts committee cannot be utilized by the Crown and the RCMP in prosecuting that individual. Is that the case?

Mr. Rob Walsh: With one exception—perjury.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Perjury. All right.

With the greatest respect to the mover, do you see this request as unintentionally being a way to circumvent the ground rules of a person appearing before the public accounts committee?

Mr. Rob Walsh: I don't, and I'll explain why.

What the committee is trying to do with the witnesses is give them the assurance that they enjoy the protections of parliamentary law in appearing in front of that committee, and that they can be full and forthcoming with the committee and not be concerned about their testimony being used against them elsewhere. They try to give the witnesses the comfort of that, but that principle is not a licence to lie. It's not a licence to mislead the committee.

Subject to that qualifier, yes, they ought to be assured of every protection for what they say before a committee. But if they're going to mislead the committee or lie to the committee, then they may not have that protection. They may not. It depends on what the committee chooses to do.

• (1340)

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: As I understand it, Justice Gomery was chosen to conduct this inquiry because he is an experienced, obviously competent judge, clearly. And as I understand the request to the committee—and I haven't seen it in writing—a person under contract is presumably being asked to make a recommendation to the committee as to whether or not a particular witness lied, or was inconsistent at least, on one or two occasions.

Mr. Rob Walsh: My understanding is that the persons hired will not be asked to make any recommendations of a kind that require them to form or develop a legal conclusion or a legal opinion. They will simply be asked to scan the testimony in one context and the testimony in another context to see where the answers appear to be inconsistent, if not contradictory or incomplete.

Once these portions are identified—this is the way I have assumed it's going to go; the committee may decide otherwise—the committee then will say, okay, we have this report of apparent inconsistencies, contradictions, whatever, so what are we going to do with it? One thing they might do is seek a legal opinion as to whether these contradictions or inconsistencies would form the basis for any charge of perjury. That's one extreme. They may decide not to go that far and will say, maybe we want to call the witness back and give the witness an opportunity to explain this inconsistency, because maybe there is an explanation.

It would be my recommendation to a committee, generally, not to assume that because there was an inconsistency it was intentional, that the witness meant to mislead. There may be a reason. Don't forget, time elapses between the time you're in front of a committee and the time you're later testifying somewhere else. A number of factors could come into play to explain the apparent inconsistency.

So there's that step the committee has to go through.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: Is there anything, as far as you know, in the office budget of a particular member that would preclude the particular member from hiring somebody to do this?

Mr. Rob Walsh: Members of Parliament, as I understand the financial rules, can use their funding to hire consultants, in some respects. They can't hire a lawyer, for example. The board is very strict about that. They can't hire a lawyer to act as a lawyer. They can hire researchers and they can hire consultants perhaps to advise on some policy issue of interest to a member, and maybe in some cases they could hire someone out of their MOBs for this particular project. I think we'd need to talk to the financial people of the House to give us a more authoritative answer on that.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: All right. I have one final question. Thank you for the indulgence, Madam Chair.

Assuming for a moment that no perjury is discovered, so to speak—and I'll use that term in the broad sense—where does that leave the committee in response to the witness challenging the committee, even requesting such scrutiny, if in fact the witness was assured that his testimony would go no further?

Mr. Rob Walsh: I don't know whether I understand your question, Mr. St. Amand.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: If no perjury is found.... I mean, I presume a witness comes before the public accounts committee and is assured this will not form the basis of any further scrutiny. Is that the case?

Mr. Rob Walsh: With the witness being called back a second time to explain an inconsistency?

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand: The first time.

Mr. Rob Walsh: The first time they appear, what they're saying won't be used elsewhere. The committee might use what they're telling the committee, obviously, in preparing a report or comparing it against another witness the committee is hearing from. The committee might even go back to that witness to say, why did you tell us that on that date, because now we have this testimony from the other witnesses saying something else?

Yes, the testimony of a witness could be used by the committee against the witness, but it won't be used elsewhere.

The Chair: I just have one follow-up question, and then Mr. Williams wants to answer some of these concerns as well.

Is "elsewhere" restricted to a court of law? What about "elsewhere" if it were something like the National Press Theatre?

Mr. Rob Walsh: This all stems from the Bill of Rights Act of 1689, and the phrase used is "in any other place". But the general interpretation means that this is a place where some legal proceeding of some kind is going on, and as a result of which some action could be taken against a person by virtue of what they said.

What happens in a parliamentary committee in the way of testimony could be discussed anywhere. But when you get to a judicial inquiry, for example, or a public inquiry—perhaps not a judicial inquiry, but certainly a public inquiry or a court of law, those kinds of places—those really are the places that are the target of this protection. You can't use the testimony given here in some other place as evidence in some other proceeding. In other words, the evidentiary value of what's said before a parliamentary committee begins and ends with the parliamentary committee.

• (1345)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Williams.

Mr. John Williams: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, Mr. Brault did not appear before the parliamentary committee. Therefore, there is no conflict there and there would be no testimony to compare. So as far as any impact on a judicial hearing for him is concerned, that point is irrelevant.

The second point is, as our law clerk has pointed out, the committee went into significant detail about a year ago, last November, into the understanding of the Bill of Rights of 1689 that parliamentary proceedings are privileged and, as he just explained, cannot be introduced in another place, a court of law...and be sanctioned by what they have said here. Only we have that right. That request was made, and that is why the committee dealt with it last year and protected the testimony, and therefore, protected what was said here for those people who were also appearing at the Gomery inquiry, so that no comparison at the Gomery inquiry could be made.

We insisted on our rights, as parliamentarians, and for the witnesses who appeared before us. Therefore, only we, as the law clerk has pointed out, have the capacity to take this one step further, if we so desire. The courts can't do it; nobody else can do it. It's our privilege. Only we can do it.

The third point, of course, is that we cannot use individual budgets because this is a committee decision. It was a unanimous decision of the committee that the committee request the comparisons, and therefore it would be quite inappropriate. And you know how this committee has prevented people from using their points for travel and so on. On the same basis, we could never collectively bring together our MOBs to do some committee work. We could never pool our MOB funds as committee members to do something that rightly belongs to the committee.

I want to reiterate two more things: one, this is a comparison of the public record here in the Parliament versus the public record at the Gomery inquiry, with a presentation of a report saying this was said here and that was said there, with no conclusions whatsoever. It is for us to draw conclusions. This report will have no conclusions, only that this was said here and that was said there—both on the public record.

As for the last point, Madam Chair, the committees—and we've had this discussion many times—are masters of their own destiny. If they decide to do something, we've always said it's their right to do so. It is not for this committee to challenge that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williams.

Mr. Telegdi has not spoken. Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Madam Chair, I think we're probably taking too much time on this. We had before us a unanimous request from a committee, and I think our job is to facilitate those requests.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that in mind, Mr. Williams has moved this, I believe.

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

The Chair: I'll now ask the clerk to give us a brief outline of the process and the submission deadline for travel plans between January and March.

The Clerk: Thank you, Madam Chair. Essentially it was more of a question to the subcommittee as to how they want to proceed for planning travel for the next period, January to March, in terms of having a deadline to submit budgets so that the subcommittee can review all the requests at once, as opposed to on a first-come first-served basis.

Perhaps a suggestion would be that if Friday, November 25, is fixed as a date for the deadline for committees to submit plans for the January to March period, that would give the last week of November and the first week of December for the subcommittee to review all the requests, if that's—

The Chair: You need a week to get it organized, though, don't you?

The Clerk: If the deadline is Friday, we can have a meeting on December 1. That would give us sufficient time.

• (1350)

The Chair: How do you feel about that—having a travel plan ready by the end of November, or your budget ready?

Mr. Wappel.

Mr. Tom Wappel: Madam Chair, I have two points. Would the timeline the clerk has suggested give the main committee time to approve what the subcommittee is recommending?

The Clerk: Yes, assuming that the House sits till December 23. If for some reason—

Mr. Tom Wappel: Don't assume for a moment that the House is going to sit until December 23.

The Clerk: I'm sorry, until the 16th—the normal sitting days of the House. My apologies.

Mr. Tom Wappel: Back it up a week.

The Clerk: Yes, it would still provide the week of December 5, if the full Liaison Committee needs to meet.

Mr. Tom Wappel: That's my next question. If the subcommittee agrees to these budget requests, is it not the case that the main committee still has to meet to approve the subcommittee's request, or do we have the final say at this point?

The Clerk: If the subcommittee agrees on all the requests, the subcommittee can finalize those requests. It's only when there's need for further discussion that sometimes it goes to the Liaison Committee, but the budget subcommittee has full authority to approve budgets.

Mr. Tom Wappel: All right, then we still should leave enough time, in the event that the subcommittee has a problem with one or more suggestions. And it seems to me all of these matters should be dealt with before we break, for obvious reasons, so if that timeline the clerk has suggested would give us an opportunity as a subcommittee to deal with the requests and to have the main committee deal with any controversial requests, then the only question is your question, Madam Chair: what do we as chairs feel about that kind of deadline?

As chair of the fisheries committee, I have no problem with it.

Mr. Rob Anders: I don't have a problem with it. Generally, my thoughts are, the tighter the timelines, the less potential for travel, the more taxpayer money saved. It sounds good.

Mr. Paul Steckle: I have no problem. My committee travel has been nixed. We were to travel this month, and one of the parties decided, for whatever reasons, that it didn't concur, and so we didn't get the concurrence of the House, even though this committee had given its support. So our money has been turned back. I have no plans to travel, or our committee has no plans to travel, in this particular mandate of government, and I don't expect we'll be requesting anything until probably in another government.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Telegdi, would you find November 25 onerous? If you were planning some travel in the new year, could you get your committee to think about it and suggest—

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: No, we have no plans to travel at all.

The Chair: Okay.

The Clerk: This may be rather easy.

The Chair: All I want to say is that if none of this travel takes place, I certainly want to get some kind of award from the Governor General for securing \$5 million in spending.

Or maybe I should just ask Mr. Anders to give me a reward, because he loves saving money.

Mr. Rob Anders: You get a star.

The Chair: On my forehead—one.

I thank you for your attention, gentlemen. It's now just before five minutes to two.

This meeting is adjourned.

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