



House of Commons  
CANADA

# Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri- Food

---

AGRI • NUMBER 001 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

---

EVIDENCE

**Thursday, May 4, 2006**

—  
**Chair**

Mr. Gerry Ritz

All parliamentary publications are available on the  
"Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire" at the following address:

**<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

## Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Thursday, May 4, 2006

• (0905)

[English]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Jean-François Lafleur):** Good morning.

Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), I'm now ready to receive nominations to elect the chair.

Are there any motions on the floor?

**Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.):** I would move that Mr. Gerry Ritz be the chair.

[Translation]

**The Clerk:** Are there any other nominations? Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare Mr. Ritz duly elected Chair of the committee. Congratulations.

[English]

Congratulations.

I'm now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair of the official opposition.

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** I'd like to nominate Paul Steckle.

**The Clerk:** Thank you very much.

Are there any other nominations?

I see none. I declare Mr. Steckle duly elected.

Thank you.

[Translation]

I am now ready to receive nominations for the position of second vice-chair. The prospective candidate must represent a party other than the Official Opposition.

You have the floor, Ms. DeBellefeuille.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** I nominate Mr. Bellavance.

**The Clerk:** We have a motion nominating Mr. Bellavance as second vice-chair. Are there any other nominations? Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare Mr. Bellavance duly elected second vice-chair of the committee. Congratulations.

I now invite Mr. Ritz to take the Chair.

[English]

I would like to invite Mr. Ritz to take the chair.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** I just have a question, and it's really for Mr. Ritz.

There has been a fair bit of discussion in the media, and I did see you quoted as chair of the agriculture committee some two weeks ago in one of the papers. The view was that you were the Prime Minister's pick. I figure I will get it from you, but could we be assured by you that the direction you take will be from the committee and not necessarily out of the Prime Minister's Office?

**The Chair (Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** I certainly take that direction.

Mr. Easter, as you well know, committees are stand-alone; we're not politically driven. This committee, actually, has been more non-partisan than a lot of other committees that we've all had the opportunity to sit on. I would like to continue in the collegial way that we have operated, and so on. I can assure you of that. As you well know, everything you see in the media is not always factual, and some of the quotes may not be direct.

Thank you for your intervention.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** That's fine.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Bellavance, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congratulations on your election.

May we move immediately to routine procedural motions for this committee and for the steering committee? I have several comments that I wish to make on the subject.

• (0910)

[English]

**The Chair:** Yes, most definitely, Mr. Bellavance. We do have a list of routine motions that we will run through. Feel free to interject at any point, but there is an order that we will work through. Certainly, we will discuss a lot of those issues as we move along.

Is there anyone else before we start into routine proceedings here?

Yes, Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** I wonder, Mr. Chair, whether there is available for all of us a circulated document to the effect of the agenda for this morning, or is it just...?

**The Chair:** Well, I actually brought one with me from the international trade committee meeting I sat in on yesterday.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** It's normal procedure that there's usually one for every member at the table.

**The Chair:** Right. We'll have them directly. Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, we'll take a short break while we get some photocopying done to fulfill Mr. Steckle's wishes. If you want to grab a coffee or juice at the back, feel free to do that. It will take us about five minutes.

● (0911) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (0922)

**The Chair:** Ladies and gentlemen, I call this meeting back to order.

Thank you for your patience, ladies and gentlemen. We have the documents back in front of you. I think you will find they are in order. Understanding that there will be some discussion on two of the motions—the second and the fourth motions on your sheet—I would ask for consensus that we do those last. Let's work our way through the rest of the list and then move into those for the discussion phase.

Is everyone happy with that?

All right. Having seen agreement, I'll start with the first motion, services of an analyst from the Library of Parliament. Would someone care to move that motion? Is there any discussion on it?

Mr. Easter moves the motion.

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

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** We just wonder if we should get the same old fellow or not, but we'll see.

**The Chair:** Well, he's pretty darned good. His credentials are there. He's gotten nothing but better, Wayne. It's like fine wine.

J.D., would you care to join us at the table, sir, now that you're back on the payroll?

All right. We will skip the second motion and pick it up at or towards the end of the meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen, we'll move to the third motion, the motion to receive and publish evidence in the absence of a quorum.

Is there any discussion on that motion?

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Could we just have a little bit of an explanation from the clerk on what all that might entail?

**The Chair:** Certainly.

**The Clerk:** This motion is just to have a minimum quorum in terms of listening to witnesses. It will require only five members, including one from the opposition, to be present for the meeting to be considered in order. That's basically it.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** There wouldn't be any motions or anything allowed because of the lack of quorum; it's just to receive information.

**The Clerk:** Yes, only for those purposes.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** So in order to make that official, Mr. Chairman, would that information have to be accepted by motion at the next meeting after that?

**The Chair:** No, this would accept the evidence. It could become part of a report, but there would be no motions placed or anything like that.

Mr. Easter.

● (0925)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Yes, the reason that was put in, Larry, in previous times, is that there are times when there are not enough people here and witnesses come to town. I think it's unfair to witnesses who come here that if there are only a few members, the witnesses aren't heard. It's in fairness to witnesses, and it protects the government in that motions can't be made, but you can still hear the evidence.

**The Chair:** Now, we still need a mover for that motion, if you're okay with that, Larry.

Mr. Bezan moves.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** We'll move on to the fifth motion on your list, 48 hours' notice for acceptance of a motion. That was standard from the last committee.

Is there any discussion on that, ladies and gentlemen?

Seeing none, Mr. Steckle moves.

Is the committee adopting that motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** On the next page, we have in camera meetings. It's fairly straightforward again. This was carried over from last time as well, that a copy of the minutes would be kept by the clerk for reference by committee members only.

Is there any discussion on that particular motion?

Seeing none, I need a mover. Mr. Easter.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The next is payment of witnesses' travel and living expenses. There is one little correction to that. At the end of the third line, it should say "two representatives". That was standard last time. Somehow we have "one" there. We will pay reasonable travel requirements for up to two representatives.

Does anyone have any concerns with that particular motion? Any discussion?

Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I question the need for us to cover two. It's not a big deal, but at the same time most witnesses who come here have, in a roundabout way, something to gain for the organization they're representing, especially if it's a...I'll use the term "commodity group" or something else.

I guess it isn't a big deal, but I think a lot of times the witnesses who come here also have something to gain, and it probably wouldn't hurt their organizations to cover that second individual. I'm not going to cry over spilt milk if it doesn't get covered, but—

**The Chair:** Now is the time to discuss it, Mr. Miller. Thank you.

Are you prepared to put that in the form of a motion to be voted on before the committee?

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I think I'd like to hear comments from some of the other members on the issue.

**The Chair:** Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Yes. I would hope Mr. Miller isn't suggesting that we impose the greater costs on farm organizations when they're in a time of great need.

Like you, I do strongly support the two members. If it's the president of a commodity group, they often have an executive secretary, and they tend to work together. The president is often out in the fields or in the barns doing the farm business, and the farm policy end is assisted by an executive secretary or a paid staffer of the organization. So I think it's important to have the two witnesses: the farm side and the policy and technical side.

Really, I don't believe farm organizations have the funds. If the farm communities are in trouble, they're in trouble too. They just don't have the money to fund it themselves, but we need to hear from them.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Easter.

Mr. Bezan.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Wayne and I both come from the farm politics side of the business, and he was a lucky person to have one of those staffers. I don't think they need their technical staff to fly here with them for a 10-minute presentation. I think one representative to carry the message for the farm organization is plenty. For fiscal prudence, I think what Larry suggested is a good idea—just paying one person. If they want to bring a staffer or an extra person, they should do it out of their own pocket. We will give them the opportunity to appear and carry the message for their organization.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bellavance, then Mr. Steckle.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** As far as I'm concerned, we're nickel and diming it. We've always reimbursed the expenses of two representatives. The arguments put forward thus far have failed to convince me. I don't think the committee is in such dire financial straits that it has to refuse to reimburse witness expenses. Regardless, persons will not travel here alone to testify. We won't force them into that position. I think it's reasonable of us to reimburse the expenses of two representatives, if they so request. If, after a while, it becomes clear the committee can no longer pay these expenses, then we can revise the routine motion.

● (0930)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bellavance.

Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

I support the view of two representatives. Perhaps we can understand this part, because as chair, I know I didn't understand everything that came to this table. I was always pleased to be able to look to my right and refer to either my researcher or my clerk for guidance.

Many times, the president of an organization has not prepared the document that he's presenting, and if there are questions, rather than wait for further explanation by correspondence, it can be done then. I think it's important that when the organizations feel they should have two, that they be allowed to have two.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Steckle.

Mr. Boshcoff.

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Thank you very much.

I notice in our standing committee reports on expenditures that considerably less than half of our expenditures were used last year. Perhaps the clerk can explain. We have a large budget, compared to many other committees, yet we didn't seem to use it all. Was there a reason for that, notwithstanding the season?

**The Chair:** We didn't do any travelling. The big difference would have been, Mr. Boshcoff, that we never left Ottawa. There was no travel done in that particular timeframe. We had the option, but it just didn't work out. That would be the biggest factor.

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** Okay. I'm looking at some of the other committees, and we seem to be in the lower end for calling witnesses. If the committee wasn't doing a lot of travelling, then theoretically they should have been entertaining more witnesses. But they only seem to have used \$13,500, as opposed to, say, \$79,000 for Justice. You can see there are some differences there.

**The Chair:** Is that the briefing book document that we all received that you're quoting from?

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** Yes. I'm sure everybody memorized it before they got here.

**The Chair:** I'm positive. I know I did. That's how I knew you had it.

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** Nonetheless, I'm trying to understand. It seems that the argument is this. If we allow two people, and two people come, this will automatically raise our expenses. If we limit it to one, probably one person will come. If you offer it to two, some people may take advantage of that, and the concern is whether the committee could afford that. If it looks like it's being abused, then I would think we should re-examine it, but at this stage I think we should go with the two. Based on the number of witnesses called versus other committees, it seems that this has been reasonable and modest, as opposed to excessive.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ken.

Alex, you had an intervention?

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** Yes. Listening to both sides here, I think we have a big job ahead of us and we need...we can hear from as many people as possible. If we can somehow help in that way, why not do it? Obviously, if it's abused, we should look at it. I would agree with the motion for having two people.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is there any other discussion? I think we've gone around.

Mr. Miller, do you have a last point?

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Yes.

I'm glad we had the discussion. We're here not only to get information, but also to avoid wasting taxpayers' money.

To go back to Wayne's comments, I did not in any way intend to make commodity groups suffer. That isn't what this was all about.

I'll give you some examples. Many times in the last year and a half we would have four representatives from one organization—I remember one in particular—and only one member, one of those four individuals, spoke. In most cases, one individual out of three or four would do 90% to 95% of the speaking. As well, some of the commodity groups—and I won't name them—have representatives right here in Ottawa, so when an individual travelled from Alberta, for example, they also had one of their representatives already here.

Hearing all the discussion, Mr. Chairman, I have no problem at this point in supporting the two. I think it was a good discussion, but when we have three to four representatives here, I don't think it benefits a whole lot, and maybe we should look at the numbers there.

• (0935)

**The Chair:** We tend to do that through the speaking time allowed, Mr. Miller.

Mr. Bezan, do you have one last point?

**Mr. James Bezan:** I have one last point, just so Ken can understand why there is a discrepancy between what we budgeted and what we paid. It's because farm organizations, for the most part, pay their way to be here. It's only been used in times of financial hardship of different organizations or for witnesses who come forward. So not having to spend the money didn't affect our work as a committee last time.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you. I think we've had a full discussion on that.

Would someone care to move that motion? We've had Mr. Miller's objections withdrawn. Mr. Boshcoff moves the motion.

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

**The Chair:** Thank you.

On the motion for distribution of documents with translation, is there any discussion? Again, it's fairly straightforward from last time. It's pretty much synonymous.

It is moved by Mr. Steckle. Is it accepted by the committee?

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

**The Chair:** On working meals, we've had the odd time...it depends a lot on your time for the committee. Ours will be 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. You've had that notice. At one point we were at the 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock timeframe. From time to time, when we've had special witnesses come in, we've also had supper meals.

Does anyone have a concern with that particular motion?

Mr. Boshcoff—you're on a diet?

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** It's probably a good idea, actually. Life here is like one giant calorie.

I feel that to some extent... I think we should add that if it's necessary, as opposed to normal, because when we're eating and the witnesses are here, not only is it kind of uncomfortable for us, but it's somewhat embarrassing. I think 1 o'clock isn't a long stretch to go to have our lunch, either before or after. I'm in favour of dumping the meal thing unless we're working through a special meeting.

**The Chair:** Are you prepared to put in an amendment to say if necessary—to add the two words “if necessary”?

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** Yes. That would be my amendment.

**The Chair:** Okay.

It is moved by Mr. Boshcoff that we add “if necessary” after that.

Is there any discussion on the amendment? Everyone is okay with that? It seems fairly innocuous.

The mover then would read the motion with his amendment in it.

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** The motion is that the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide for working meals for the committee and its subcommittees if necessary.

**The Chair:** Okay. You're putting it at the end, rather than.... Yes, it's still in there.

Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Can I add an amendment to the amendment—to what was said?

**The Chair:** We have to handle one first. If you want to do another amendment, we'll clear the floor.

Mr. Boshcoff is adding “if necessary” at the end of the motion. Does anyone have a concern with that?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** All right, it's "if necessary". We don't want anybody cranky.

Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I was just going to add further that it be at the chairman's discretion to decipher what is "as necessary".

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff:** I take that as a friendly amendment

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Miller.

We have a friendly amendment, which is, "if necessary at the discretion of the chair"... Mr. Boshcoff has accepted it. Is everyone okay with that? Do you want me to read the whole motion again?

**A voice:** Please.

**The Chair:** The motion reads:

That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide for working meals for the Committee and its subcommittees if necessary, and at the discretion of the Chair

(Motion as amended agreed to)

**The Chair:** Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

In camera meeting transcripts. We actually basically covered that up higher, did we not? It's basically the same. We covered the transcripts up higher here. We will ignore that one.

Having come to the end of that page, we'll go back to page 1, ladies and gentlemen, and start with the second motion establishing a subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

Mr. Bellavance, you had an intervention on that particular motion, I understand.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Chairman, when I served on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, we amended the routine motion, because occasionally some persons who were not specifically staff in the member's office were in attendance. The motion in French reads as follows: "Que, à moins qu'il en soit ordonné autrement, chaque membre du Comité soit autorisé à être accompagné d'un membre du personnel du parti aux séances à huis clos".

From time to time, as we're seeing here today in the case of the persons seated behind the Conservatives...

• (0940)

[English]

**The Chair:** If I could just stop you, Mr. Bellavance, you're actually on to a different issue. We actually haven't covered this, that in in camera meetings we be allowed one staffer in the room. That's what you're speaking to. That motion isn't on our list, but we can certainly add it.

The motion we're on to now is establishing a subcommittee on agenda and procedure. But we can certainly go back if you would like. So you want to introduce a motion.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I'm sorry, but it was my understanding that we would be reviewing certain items and that the clerk had informed you of the topics I wished to discuss.

[English]

**The Chair:** All right. You're returning to the in camera meetings motion that we accepted, the second paragraph of that. That's fine. Do we have unanimous consent to return to that motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bellavance, continue.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I merely wanted to draw your attention to the fact that they are all accompanied by staff persons, and I don't have a problem with that, but occasionally they may be accompanied by staff from the whip's or from a minister's office, in the case of a government member. I don't see that as being a problem and I think all parties could benefit from the presence of such individuals.

For example, for one reason or another, I could ask a staff person from the whip's office to accompany me, instead of my assistant. Perhaps the wording of the French version of the motion could be amended slightly to read as follows: "Que, à moins qu'il en soit ordonné autrement, chaque membre du Comité soit autorisé à être accompagné d'un membre du personnel du parti aux séances à huis clos".

All parties, not just the Bloc Québécois, would stand to benefit from this amendment.

[English]

**The Chair:** I understand we have a bit of discrepancy between the English and the French. If we clean it up to your specifications we should be okay. The English basically reads "one staff person", and you would take that to be one of your own staff persons. Someone from the whip's office is not your staff person. There's a discrepancy in the French translation, I understand. Your concern is that you don't want someone from a government office or agency, as opposed to an actual staff member of, say, Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** No, that's what he wants.

**The Chair:** So you do want the allowance to be able to pick who you want.

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I'd like to have the option of being accompanied by a party staff person. I have no objection to Mr. Anderson being accompanied by a member of his staff or by a member of the minister's staff. This had never posed a problem on another committee on which I served. However, right in the middle of the session, someone objected to the fact that the individual wasn't a staff person in...

[English]

**The Chair:** Your concern is with the number. One is okay. The problem is you want to be able to pick who that one is.

Does anyone have a concern with that?

Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I don't have any concern with it. I know myself I'm not going to be bringing anybody other than my own staffer. But if somebody wants to do that, it's up to them. Keep the number at one.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** I'm okay with that. I think there may be a translation problem because the English does say to have one staff person. It doesn't designate that it has to be your own. It might be just a change in the translation on the French side that would allow that.

**The Chair:** I'll defer to the clerk.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Rather than one of their own staff, it should just read "one staff person", unless you have an amendment.

**The Chair:** Do you have a specific amendment, Mr. Bellavance, or would just the translation change be okay with you so that it says "one staff person" and you designate who it is?

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** That's right. If the French version is identical to the English version, then we don't have a problem.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay.

The clerk will read it back, Mr. Bellavance. I'll have the clerk read it back to you with the proposed change that you're thinking of, and you see if you're okay with it.

[Translation]

**The Clerk:** So then, if I understand correctly, you would like the French version of the motion to be amended to read as follows: "Que, à moins qu'il en soit ordonné autrement, chaque membre du Comité soit autorisé à être accompagné d'un membre du personnel du parti aux séances à huis clos". Is that satisfactory to you?

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Yes.

[English]

**The Chair:** Are there any other concerns on that particular motion? Are we okay with the French amendment for Mr. Bellavance?

Mr. Bellavance, will you move that amendment?

• (0945)

[Translation]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Yes.

[English]

**The Chair:** It is so moved by Mr. Bellavance.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Good. We've cleaned that up.

We're back to page 1, the second section, a motion establishing a subcommittee on agenda and procedure. There is a work-up underneath that. We actually didn't use that last time around; we used the committee as a whole. You can correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Steckle. Last time around for planning an agenda committee we used the committee as a whole, but this particular motion calls for a

subcommittee on agenda and procedure to be composed of the chair, two vice-chairs, and a member of the other opposition party. Are we working that way now? We'll have some discussion on that.

Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** I should point out that the normal procedure has been as we see the motion this morning. My view was that in keeping with the fact that we were a government and it would load the dice rather in favour of the government, given that we had fewer over there, we were still going to have the majority. We did not have a majority government, so I felt it was fair, and we agreed to that. So we sort of deviated from the normal policy. This is going back to the original policy.

**The Chair:** The way the motion is written, it would actually be a member of each party. That's the way the motion reads at this point.

Is there any more discussion? Mr. Miller?

**Mr. Larry Miller:** I don't have any preference, Mr. Chairman, either way.

There is one question that I would throw out to Mr. Steckle and you. You were involved on it and whoever was vice-chair. How did it work last time? If it worked well, I'm not hung up either way.

**The Chair:** We consulted with each other. We'd have a short in camera session at the beginning or the end of a meeting and raise whatever the issue was, work it through, and everybody seemed to be okay with that.

It's either/or. I'm happy with it either way.

The greatest advantage was that we were already here. We were already sitting and we didn't have to have a separate meeting and arrange a time and a place and all of those wonderful things. So for expediency sake, probably doing it as we did before is the easiest, but certainly we can adopt this or whatever we care to do.

Mr. Easter.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** We've done it both ways on committees that I have had the opportunity to chair. Personally, I think a steering committee is better, especially if you're into a lot of issues. The committee as a whole makes some suggestions to the steering committee and then they can sit down and take more time. It doesn't take the time of everybody on the committee. They can sit down and take more time to prioritize the issues, especially when it comes to budgeting issues.

I like the steering committee approach better. I find it's easier to make decisions with a smaller group than with a bigger group, but both work. It's not a whole lot of difference either way. I'm just telling you my own personal point of view. As a chair, I liked the steering committee.

**The Chair:** Fine. Thank you.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Atamanenko.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** I'm just not sure of what the difference is. This is the main committee, and I'm not sure what you're talking about. Could you give me clarification?



**The Chair:** You would be on it either way, as the representative of the fourth party.

If we do it in the way the motion is set out here, it would be myself as chair, Mr. Steckle as vice-chair, Mr. Bellavance as vice-chair, and you as the representative of the fourth party. That is in the way this is laid out.

If we did it as a committee as a whole, everyone who is sitting around the table at this point would be part of it.

I only brought it up because we had done it as a committee as a whole last time in a minority situation. We seem to have that situation again, so I'm just throwing it out for discussion so that we cover it off.

I don't have a problem with it being a subcommittee. As Mr. Easter points out, there are some benefits to either way. I'm leaving it up to the committee. I'm just putting this in front of you.

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** As Wayne and I usually do, I would agree with him on this—given the new era of cooperation in which we exist—that it's good to have it in a smaller group.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** That scares me, but thank you for the point!

**Mr. David Anderson:** I thought it might.

I just think for the sake of management, it's easier if a smaller group is making those decisions and brings them back to the bigger group, but it's up to the committee.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bellavance, my apologies.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Fine then. There appears to be a general consensus. I've also had an opportunity to see both policies in play. While I'm not saying that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food wasn't running smoothly, I do clearly prefer a restricted committee. I'd like committee members to opt for this approach.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** Mr. Chair, since we are in a spirit of cooperation this morning, and as one who has led the other side, I will defer to the new way of doing business in this session and we will go to the steering committee.

**The Chair:** So moved by Mr. Steckle.

Is there agreement by the committee that we work with a subcommittee?

(Motion agreed to)

● (0950)

**The Chair:** That subcommittee will be comprised of me, Mr. Steckle, Mr. Bellavance, and Mr. Atamanenko.

Good. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

The last, of course, is always the one we have the most fun discussing—the allocation of time for questioning. We certainly have

a myriad of different options available to us. I will open the floor to those. We did it a certain way last time; do we want to try something different?

I'll open the floor to that discussion.

Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** I can tell you from a chair's perspective that the system we had last time worked well. We sometimes had some differences in terms of my judgment, but I think in terms of the time allocation—and David should of course agree with this because he was given an unusual length of time to pose his questions, or to do his commentary, I should say.

**Mr. David Anderson:** That was just because of the quality of it!

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson, you're out of order, actually.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** So I would suggest that we follow the procedure we followed during the last government and continue with the ten-minute opening round and then with the seven- and five-minute rounds.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Steckle.

Is there any other discussion?

Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Again, it's one of those issues that I'm not hung up on big time, but at the same time, if you have the same amount for everyone, it's certainly fairer, I would say. But again, it's not a big issue.

I have a deeper issue, and it's basically on the number of speakers and on who actually speaks, which I would like to bring up at the end of this discussion; I think you're aware of that. I think the fairest way you could have it is if everybody spoke for the same amount of time, and at the same time, as with the past chair, I can respect that each party gets those first seven minutes.

I think if I had a preference and if there were a vote on it, I'd probably go for five minutes each, but again, I think we have bigger fish to fry.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Miller.

Is there anyone else with an intervention on this?

The one decision we could make, then.... They talk about both a ten-minute opening statement or a seven-minute opening statement, with witnesses having ten minutes and then seven minutes for the questioner, and then subsequent rounds with five minutes per party. We're okay with that part of it?

If we're adopting the way we did it the last time.... We actually have that motion right on the top of our time rotation, just for reference. I'll just read it into the record:

By unanimous consent, it was agreed, — That witnesses be given 10 minutes for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated 7 minutes for the first questioner of each party; that before the second round of questioning, other members who wish to speak may do so; and that thereafter, 5 minutes be allocated to each subsequent questioner [alternating between Government and Opposition parties].

Mr. Steckle.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** I think what you will find, Mr. Chair, is that oftentimes you as the chair have to determine who should be the questioner. For instance, if you come to our side, we have to decide, and I'd give you the opportunity to decide who would speak on your behalf for your party. But often we have to limit this, because we don't have the time; we run out of time.

**The Chair:** Yes, very true.

**Mr. Paul Steckle:** So time is a constraint at times. This works, but we have to rely on our chair to manage that time.

**The Chair:** It's a guideline only. It is a moving target, and Mr. Steckle did an admirable job.

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** I'm in favour of giving all members the opportunity to question a witness. It's very important to give everyone the right to speak. I know that other committees take a fairly straightforward approach. During the first round of questioning, a representative of the Official Opposition goes first, followed by a representative of the other opposition party, followed by a representative of the government party and lastly, by a member of the fourth party. For the second round of questioning, the exact same order is followed. Party members decide who gets to ask questions.

I trust that you will be as skilful as Mr. Steckle was in terms of keeping track of things. Personally, I've lost track of the speaking order from time to time. Most likely I'll be asking you at times why I haven't had my turn, because I think I've been passed over. I'm in favour of giving everyone an opportunity to speak.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bellavance. You're absolutely right. Of course, if it goes wrong it will be the clerk's fault.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Is there any more discussion on this?

Yes, Mr. Miller.

• (0955)

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Yes, there is.

I have a letter that I sent to the past chair. I have to apologize to the Bloc members because I didn't get it in both official languages, so I'd have to ask for special permission to distribute it. My concern here—and it goes back to this letter—is the fact that I was sitting over there last time and, being a rookie, quite often I was third or fourth, and that was fine; I accepted that. But what really disappointed me—and I think the opposition this time will find the same thing—is that some of your members will not get a chance to ask a question until some individuals from the Bloc or the NDP are on their second round of questioning. For the sake of democracy, I don't think that is the right way to go. I believe every individual should have a chance to ask his or her questions.

This committee is divided up according to the number of seats that each party elected. I think that was decided on among the four parties. I think the questioning should run on the same example. So I throw that out.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that, Mr. Miller. I certainly can't disagree with you. It is a moving target. I think Mr. Steckle did a great job in managing our resources.

The one concern I have is that a lot of the witnesses have not been notified ahead of time that they have 10 minutes. They come with a half-hour presentation, and three people each want to take a chunk of that so it takes 40 minutes to do it. I think we need to be very diligent when we invite people before us, and we need to enforce that in the letter of invitation, saying you have 10 minutes maximum; I don't care if five people take two minutes each, but you have 10 minutes. If we enforce that, then we will have fewer problems with our questioning rotation. So we will work from that standpoint to give us more time for questioning.

Also, yesterday, when we struck the international trade committee, they made a point of saying that it would be very helpful if we could get the documentation almost a week ahead, if we could. There are going to be certain instances in which we can't do that, in emergency crisis types of situations, but if we can get their material ahead of time we'll also have a better chance of coming up with a stronger line of questioning, if we have more time to reference it.

I know we're always within time constraints, so we will work diligently from the table to make sure the presenters don't go over their time, so that we have more time to allocate questions. That may alleviate some of that, Mr. Miller.

Mr. Bezan, go ahead, please.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I want to agree with what you're saying, Mr. Chair. If we limit the time and make sure they know that it's 10 minutes and know that they have to have their stuff in to the clerk ahead of time so that it can be translated—which we ran into problems with quite often last time as well—and if you use your own discretion to make sure everybody has a fair shot at asking questions, I think we will be just fine.

**The Chair:** Okay. We've taken that direction.

Are there comments from anyone else?

I just want to make sure they got to speak before you got to go twice, Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Okay. I can live with that.

Just a final comment. I'm going to be holding you to it, Mr. Chairman, that they have no more than 10 minutes. And if they're two minutes late, that comes off their time.

**The Chair:** If they're just getting to the good part and they're at nine minutes and 50 seconds, I might let them go a little over.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** Okay.

We need to enforce that. I know—I've sat as chair—it is very hard sometimes to cut somebody off, but I think we have to set that precedent. Word will get around.

Further, Mr. Chairman, I'm still not happy with the other discussion. I'll be voting against that, but that's—

**The Chair:** Well, we haven't brought it to a vote yet, but I take your warning. Thank you.

Mr. Steckle actually moved that we follow last time's questioning agenda. Does anyone have concerns with that? It's not actually the one that's here. I read it off the top of our sheet from last time. It's on the record. I can read it again, if you'd like. This is what the motion will read that Mr. Steckle has moved:

By unanimous consent, it was agreed, - That witnesses be given 10 minutes for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated 7 minutes for the first questioner of each party; that before the second round of questioning, other members who have not spoken and who wish to speak may do so for 5 minutes; and that thereafter, 5 minutes be allocated to each subsequent questioner [alternating between Government and Opposition parties].

That actually speaks to Mr. Miller's issue, in that at the discretion of the chair I can move to someone else and/or a point of clarification on another questioner's question. We have that flexibility. I think this is very workable. It was as good as we could get last time. We can certainly go back and revisit this. If you have a concern, bring it back to the planning and priorities committee, the subcommittee, and we can revisit it.

Having read that again—Mr. Steckle has moved it—do we have consensus from the committee to move in that direction?

We have one nay from Mr. Miller. Other than that, everyone is fine with it.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1000)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will send a copy of the motion to everyone just for verification and clarification.

Having said that, we've come to the end of our agenda here today. As I said before, our meeting times will be 9 to 11 Tuesdays and Thursdays for the spring rotation.

The room will always be this one, or will we rotate again?

**A voice:** It will rotate.

**The Chair:** Okay. It will be a new adventure every week. The clerk is going to do his best to get us the best room possible every week.

His wife is about to have a baby on Saturday, ladies and gentlemen, so we have one meeting with Jean-François, and then we'll be switching clerks.

We wish you and your wife all the best. I hope everything works out well.

Mr. Atamanenko.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** We will be getting the agenda ahead of time. Is that what normally happens?

**The Chair:** Yes, you will.

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Chairman, I'd like to know if another meeting of the steering committee should be scheduled for the purpose of considering future business.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes. Our next meeting time is allocated for Tuesday morning, so we will have to get together before that time, probably Monday. Some of us will not be here tomorrow. Does Monday afternoon work?

I will have my staffer get back to you with a proposed time and place for Monday afternoon. We all have votes that evening so we should all be here. If we do something at 4 o'clock, does that work?

Mr. Atamanenko, is that fine with you? Okay.

We'll get back to you with a place on that. So we'll have a steering committee meeting at 4 o'clock, and then we'll report back to the main committee here on Tuesday morning of next week.

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** If people have an interest or things they want on the agenda, should they contact you and get them on there as soon as possible?

**The Chair:** They could certainly do that, yes, and then we'll start to structure our first meetings.

Mr. Miller.

**Mr. Larry Miller:** What do we have on for Tuesday, Mr. Chairman, other than just discussing the issues...?

**The Chair:** We will shortlist the list and give you a compilation of what everyone has in mind and where we want to go and then move on from that point.

Is everyone happy with that? Is there any other housekeeping?

This meeting stands adjourned.





**Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons**

**Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes**

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:  
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

---

**The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.**

**Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.**