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—
Chair

Mr. Leon Benoit

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• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): I would like to nominate Pierre Paquette, of the Bloc Québécois, for the position of vice-chair.

The Clerk: Mr. André moves that Mr. Pierre Paquette be elected vice-chair of the committee.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): I second the motion.

The Clerk: Are there any other motions on this point?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Therefore, I declare Mr. Pierre Paquette to be the duly elected vice-chair.

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Good afternoon, everyone.

I want to start by thanking everyone for electing me as chair, and I'd like to congratulate the vice-chairs from the Liberals and the Bloc. The spirit of cooperation that we've seen this afternoon in electing the chair and the vice-chairs I'm sure will be carried over to future meetings. The work we do in this committee, obviously, is not particularly partisan work, compared, quite frankly, with some other committees. So I'm looking forward to a good cooperative relationship, and I'm sure that's what we'll have.

There is some other business we can deal with this afternoon, and I believe you all have forms in front of you. So if we could just go through these motions one by one and deal with them....

Who would like to move the first motion, or a modified or different motion, applying to this issue? The title is "Services of Analysts from the Library of Parliament". These are pretty....

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): I so move.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur LeBlanc.

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

The Chair: Regarding the subcommittee on agenda and procedure, different subcommittees on agenda have been proposed with different make-ups, and some committees have suggested that we have one from each party. Usually the subcommittees on agenda work by consensus, so if there isn't consensus the issue will just come back to the full committee to deal with it anyway.

I'd like someone to move a motion on the make-up of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. Thank you, Mr. Paquette.

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

• (1545)

The Chair: On reduced quorum, the motion reads that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three members are present, including one member of the opposition, and providing that if no member of the opposition is present after 10 minutes from the designated time at the start of the meeting, that the meeting may proceed.

Does anybody want to move that motion or a modification of that motion?

It is moved by Mr. Menzies.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On the distribution of documents, would someone like to move that motion? Mr. Maloney moves it.

Just a minute, please. There are two versions of the motion. The second one is the one that I think has been recommended, so I'd have to have one or the other proposed, either the first one or the version adopted by....

So who made...? Yes, which one?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): If I understand this correctly, under the first version, a document is distributed only if it is available in both languages whereas under the second version, witnesses must be advised that their document must be available in both languages. I think the second version is the more comprehensive one.

[*English*]

The Chair: I would just suggest that this is something we could deal with now. It's something that has been done on other occasions. When we're on the road we'll have witnesses who will have material in either official language. Certainly in Ottawa this motion would say that any information that is distributed by the clerks would be in both official languages. But often that's a problem on the road.

Would the committee agree to add to that motion that if the committee is on the road hearing witnesses, the clerk could distribute documents in either official language? Would that be acceptable?

Mr. Paquette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Chairman, I think we're adopting a principle. The committee might wish to agree to proceed otherwise if a group arrives with a document that has only been drafted in English or French. We could say that, if there is consensus, the committee members may... It all depends. Normally groups are advised. If a group consistently comes to us with documents drafted only in one of the official languages, then we could refuse to distribute that document. The circumstances would be different in the case of a group who comes here for the first time and is not aware of the fact that the document must be available in both languages. I would like us to agree on the principle while remaining flexible. For example, if we go to Halifax and a women's group appears before us with a document only drafted in English, I will certainly not turn them away. However, if a group does this systematically, then perhaps I will object to their document being distributed.

Therefore I would like us to adopt the principle while agreeing to remain flexible when we are travelling.

[*English*]

The Chair: The members have heard the proposal from Monsieur Paquette. Is that acceptable, or would you like to make an addition to apply directly to witnesses providing material when the committee is out of Ottawa? What is the will of the committee on that? You've heard a proposal. Do you agree with that proposal that it will be handled on more or less an individual basis and with the consensus of the committee? Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. We'll go ahead with this motion as modified, as suggested by Monsieur Paquette.

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

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Do we need to define that in here?

The Chair: I think we can just take it from that. I believe the intent is clear to everyone.

On working meals, that's pretty routine. Does anybody want to move that motion? Mr. Cannan.

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

• (1550)

The Chair: On witnesses' expenses, again, this is a routine motion saying that if witnesses request to have expenses paid, they will be. It's only if they request it, though; it's not a routine thing. A lot of witnesses are quite willing to come at their own expense, and we would like to accommodate that, of course.

Does someone want to move this motion? Monsieur LeBlanc.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion is for staff at in camera meetings. That's one staff person to accompany each committee member at an in camera meeting.

An hon. member: So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion is that one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee.

An hon. member: So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next is on notice of motions, that 48 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, in which case the 48 hours won't be required, and that notice of motion be filed with the clerk of the committee and distributed to members in both official languages.

An hon. member: So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Now we're down to the one that may take a little more time; maybe not. It's the allocation of questioning time at committee.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Congratulations, Mr. Chair.

I would like to say hello to members who are returning, like Mr. Menzies, Mr. Eyking, and Mr. Paquette. We functioned in a very collegial way in the last Parliament. What we had for witnesses was essentially close to this option 2 that's before us. As you mentioned earlier, this is not as much of a partisan committee. It's a committee that works very effectively together. I would like to move option 2. I think that's in keeping with the past practices of the subcommittee before it became a standing committee. It's also in the spirit of that collegiality that was mentioned earlier.

The Chair: Mr. Paquette, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Peter is moving the second motion. There is no order contained in that motion for hearing questioners from the various parties. I would like to at least insure that on the first round of questioning, the Liberal Party will go first, followed by the Bloc Québécois and then the Liberals and New Democrats. I'm less concerned about the subsequent rounds. I think that the opposition parties should be able to count on being heard first. I do not have a problem with the second motion. I prefer it to the other one, which puts the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party much further down the list and gives much too much speaking time to the Conservatives. I would therefore like us to agree on opposition parties being given the floor on the first round.

[*English*]

The Chair: Just for clarity, Mr. Paquette, are you suggesting that in the first round the Conservative Party be last on the list of questioners?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: No, I mean for the first round and for the first option.

[*Translation*]

I would suggest that the Liberal Party have five minutes, the Bloc Québécois five minutes, the Conservative Party five minutes and the New Democratic Party five minutes.

[English]

The Chair: Could I ask for your thoughts on increasing the time of the first round to seven minutes maybe? That's more common, but it's of course up to the will of the committee.

Mr. Julian, go ahead, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: It says that for the first round of questioning there will be up to ten minutes for the first question of each party. I assume we're functioning the way we functioned before, which was the government, official opposition, Bloc, NDP. In the following rounds of questioning there would be up to five minutes for each subsequent questioner, and I'm assuming again the same principle: the government, official opposition, the Bloc, and the NDP. That's how we functioned in the last Parliament. It's a lot less complicated and it provides for the collegiality that we all want to see.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: At the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs—

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Menzies, go ahead, please.

Mr. Ted Menzies: It seems to me that we started out with the opposition first.

Am I right, Mr. Paquette?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: If my memory serves me well, at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs the opposition members had the floor first, then the Bloc Québécois members, then the party in power and the New Democrats, after which we started over again. I do not mind if the New Democratic Party members speak before the Conservative Party members.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Menzies, were you finished?

Mr. Ted Menzies: It was official opposition first, then government, then third party, then fourth party, if you'll allow me those terms.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I don't remember it being like that.

[English]

The Chair: Does that sound reasonable for the first round?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I would prefer that the Liberals, the Bloc members, and why not, the New Democrats... The government has an opportunity to speak through its ministers. I think that in a committee, we have to give the floor to the opposition, especially given the fact that we have a minority government. We need to go second.

[English]

The Chair: Just for clarification, Mr. Paquette, you are saying then that the three opposition parties should question first and then the governing Conservative Party?

• (1555)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Yes, if we can agree on that.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Ritz, go ahead, please.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Just further to Mr. Paquette's motion, are you saying there would be a different speaking order if there were a minister here? You're saying that government members have access to the minister so they should go last. But with witnesses we have no more access to them than you do, or any of the other parties does. Are you talking about two different—

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: No. Because you are members of the governing party, you have many opportunities to speak, not necessarily as members of Parliament but as a party. It seems to me that opposition parties should be able to speak on the first round.

If my memory serves me well, at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the Conservatives, who were the official opposition, had the floor first, followed by the Bloc Québécois, the Liberals and the New Democrats. I think we should at least have that. We could also be creative by allowing the New Democrats to speak before the Conservatives. We agreed to say that for the following rounds, we would proceed according to the interests of the parties and the members of Parliament. My suggestion is simply for the first round of questioning.

[English]

The Chair: I believe it's clear that what Mr. Paquette is suggesting is that in the first round of questioning it would be seven minutes for Liberal, then Bloc, then Conservative, then NDP. Correct? Should we go on to the rest, or should we just agree to that first?

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Subsequent to that, it would be the same order but with five-minute tours.

The Chair: Is that agreed to?

Mr. Ted Menzies: Sure.

The Chair: The suggestion, to be clear, is that the order on each round of questioning be official opposition Liberals, the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative, the government member, and then the NDP for each round. Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I just suggest for the first part of that motion, that the witnesses be given ten minutes, that the witnesses be given up to ten minutes, and that there be discretion from the chair, and that the clerk, when notifying the witnesses, will state the maximum time. Furthermore, if there's more than one witness, I suggest that we certainly don't allow ten minutes each. It's just too much time, with a statement. We did that in the government operations committee last time and we found that it's amazing how they could say the same thing in less time if they were instructed ahead of time that that was the amount of time they would be given.

Is that agreed—some discretion by the chair on that, but up to ten minutes?

Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): I agree. I just want to clarify: the second and third round, is that five or seven minutes?

The Chair: They are five minutes, all subsequent rounds.

Is it agreed then that we have that discretion in terms of the amount of time the witnesses be given?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Can I suggest one more thing? This is something we did at the government operations and estimates committee. If any member of the committee from any party has an issue that is of special interest to them and they do extra background work on this because it is of special interest, that member should be given the first round of questioning and an extended round of questioning.

We only had two takers, I believe, in the whole year and a half at the government operations and estimates committee, but it provides an incentive for all members, when it's an issue that is particularly important to them, to be given—at the discretion of the chair—the first round of questioning and extra time. It really does encourage members to come better prepared and to be at the forefront when it's an issue that's particularly important to them. I suggest it wouldn't be used that often, but it's something that would help improve the effectiveness of the committee.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We welcome the proposal, but can I understand exactly what you are proposing?

The Chair: Mr. Julian, for example, if you have a particular trade issue that's important to you, you come to me and say you'd sure like the committee to deal with this. You tell me this is an issue that is particularly important to you, and you're prepared to do extra work on this, so you would like agreement to have the first questioning and extra time if required. Then if that issue does come to the committee, I would proceed in that fashion. It really does give some extra incentive for people to prepare on issues that are of most interest to them.

Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Can we just agree then to this motion as described in our conversation here? I think it's clear what it is.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

There are no more items on the agenda, unless there are some that you would like to bring.

Monsieur Paquette.

•(1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is now the beginning of May and we have been sitting for one month. I think we could easily agree this afternoon so that we can start our work on the recent softwood lumber agreement next week. We do not have to discuss this at length. In my opinion, it is important that the International Trade Committee look at the implications of the agreement and hear the minister, the negotiators, the ambassador, if he can come, and the stakeholders.

Furthermore, we know that a bill may be tabled over the next few weeks and I think this would give us an opportunity to make recommendations to the government before the bill is tabled or at least before it is passed and an agreement is signed with the Americans. We are talking about three months.

We would be in a position to hear witnesses on this issue as early as Monday or at the latest Wednesday, next week, in order to better understand the scope of the softwood lumber agreement, as well as its implications for the North American free trade agreement.

I am moving this.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Menzies, and then Mr. Julian.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have concerns, and I respect the importance of this, not only in your region, Mr. Paquette, but in many regions across this country. I'm concerned that we will start studying an agreement when we probably don't have the ink dry on it yet, and I don't want to jeopardize it by bringing witnesses in here—jeopardize a potentially very important agreement by getting out ahead of the negotiators; I'm not sure all the dealing is done.

What I'm seeing out of this, and what I'm hearing from the lumber industry and from the provinces at this point, is that they're pretty happy with it. I certainly don't want to jeopardize a deal that we've been waiting a long time for by discussing it here. If it's a done deal, then what are we going to discuss?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Menzies.

Mr. Julian, would you mind, just before I go to you, if I bring a little bit more into this? It's normal for a committee at the first meeting to hear from the departmental officials, and I think if, through the clerk and in correspondence with the officials, we focus them a little bit, that would be a very productive meeting.

Something else that could and probably should be done, since we're dealing with trade issues, is we should ask the researchers to put together material from business organizations, and in some cases maybe from individual businesses, because businesses really are the ones involved in trade. Have them put together some information on the issues that seem to be of most interest to them, and the positions on those issues, and suggestions they've given to government, whether it be, for example, the Federation of Independent Business, or whatever organization or business it is. Have the researchers provide a document for the committee to help direct us, before we start getting off into the individual issues, and there are a lot of those that we could deal with.

It's just a suggestion. I'll go now to the committee. Of course, you decide.

Mr. Julian, followed by Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There are other issues that we will be dealing with as a committee, but no issue is as important as the issue of softwood lumber. I know in my case in British Columbia, our premier has been asking for clarification around the softwood lumber agreement. So this is the number one issue in international trade. There's no doubt that we have to deal with it, and we should proceed as quickly as possible, because that's our parliamentary responsibility as members of Parliament and as members of the international trade committee.

I can understand that at a later time we'll be adding other issues, but Mr. Paquette is absolutely right, this is the number one issue and we have to deal with it immediately.

•(1605)

The Chair: Before I go to Mr. Cannan and Mr. Paquette and then Mr. Eyking, I would just like to know, if the committee does go to that meeting, whether that's something.... Because negotiations really are ongoing—the agreement in principle is what it's called, or it's been referred to as the framework agreement, and obviously all the details of the agreement haven't been completed yet—I'm wondering whether an in camera meeting is something the committee might agree to. Otherwise, I don't know what the people involved will be able to say.

Those are my thoughts on this. I'd like the committee to consider that and to comment on that.

Next we will go to Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Specifically to the issue of the softwood meeting, I agree; I don't think it would be prudent to have discussions outside of an in camera perspective. As we know, it's a framework, and discussions have clearly indicated that it's going to take several more months to get all the details finalized. I wouldn't want to jeopardize that.

But being a new member to the committee, I would like to take you up on your offer of hearing from the department staff and getting a briefing. My colleague Mr. Lemieux hasn't even received his briefing book yet, and I just received mine, so we haven't had a chance to get an overview. I appreciate the indulgence of the committee, and I apologize if it slows you down for a meeting or

two, but I think it's probably prudent that we all come together and sing from the same song sheet in order to move forward.

The Chair: In the past we've found that it's not only helpful for new members, but it's also helpful for members who have been around for some time.

Monsieur Paquette.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: First, we are not talking about eliminating other issues. We could agree right away on having a meeting next week with department officials, perhaps even with the minister, and the negotiators. Proposals were submitted to the industry and they were asked if they approved those proposals or not. We ourselves were not involved in this. We learned what was happening through the newspapers. I think, given what the Prime Minister said, that we have a right to be informed on the progress of this agreement.

Obviously we cannot, and would not want to, intervene in the negotiations. However, this agreement will have an impact on the Canadian and Quebec softwood industries, as well as on NAFTA. I would not object to having a first meeting next week, in camera. We could then agree as a committee on the type of work we would undertake. Again, I would not object to that.

On the other hand, this does not mean that we are eliminating other issues. The subcommittee could meet and craft a proposal on the main committee's future business. That way, there would at least be one meeting next week that would be devoted to this necessary topic.

We were told that a bill would have to be tabled in Parliament. Personally, I learned this from a reporter. Perhaps the minister could tell us whether this is true or whether it is simply a rumour coming from the media?

I would agree to having a first meeting in camera, and then deciding as a committee how we will approach the issue without creating any problems for our negotiators. It seems to me that at the very least, we need to have the information that was provided last Thursday to the provinces and to the industry.

Meanwhile, I would hope that the subcommittee would meet on the issue of future business and propose a work plan. That may involve the World Trade Organization. There are, among other things, negotiations on services.

Are we going to wait for two weeks before we begin our work? We have before us a subject that we cannot avoid. Let's meet next week in camera with the minister, if possible.

[English]

The Chair: So, Monsieur Paquette, you are suggesting that we have an in camera meeting on softwood lumber and not on the future agenda of the committee?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Our first order of business would be the softwood lumber framework agreement.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Eyking, go ahead, please.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Just to follow Mr. Paquette, I don't have a problem with the first meeting being used for having staff here and giving everybody a briefing, but then we have to go right into the softwood lumber issue.

I don't like to see a precedent set here of not discussing things in this committee until after the ink is dry on every agreement. There are going to be bilaterals. There's Korea. There are NAFTA and the WTO.

As a committee, we have to be going along with the negotiators, understanding where they're going, and that's part of our role. So I don't think we should wait until the ink is dry on any agreement before we get involved. That's what our job is. We're not here to jeopardize any agreement; we're here to understand it. And they have to understand our feelings as members of Parliament.

So I'm on the same wavelength as Mr. Julian and Mr. Paquette. We can have one meeting with staff, and they can brief us on everything, and then let's get right at it and get the softwood lumber deal out there.

• (1610)

The Chair: So it sounds like the Monday meeting with departmental officials would be in order, and then what you want to do is get into softwood lumber after that in Wednesday's meeting.

Does anybody else have any comment on this?

Am I to consider that this is the proposal before the committee now? Is there any other discussion on this first before I put it to a vote?

Mr. Menzies, go ahead, please.

Mr. Ted Menzies: I would like to know, then, what the intention would be for witnesses. Are we going to ask the industry that's involved? Are we going to ask someone from the United States trade department? Who are we looking at to brief us on the deal?

The Chair: We certainly have to know that before we can invite them, so, Mr. Eyking, could we have your thoughts and suggestions on that?

Hon. Mark Eyking: My suggestion right off the bat is for the minister and maybe some of the chief negotiators on the file to come in and talk about it. That would be my suggestion.

The Chair: Does anybody else have a comment?

Mr. Menzies, go ahead, please.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Sorry to keep interrupting here, but I guess the only way I would accept that is if it's absolutely in camera. If we're going to ask the minister and trade negotiators to discuss this deal, we don't want this deal in the media before the Americans have seen it. I have concerns with that.

It is a sensitive issue. We need to be aware of that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Menzies.

Mr. Paquette, Mr. LeBlanc, and then Mr. Lemieux.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I will make a very concrete proposal. I understand that we need to give people notice, but I think it would be appropriate to meet next week, either on Monday or Wednesday, in camera, with officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade who have worked on the framework agreement. Of course, we would be more than happy if the minister were available.

I am proposing that we request the information that was provided to many people other than members of the Parliament, including those who accepted the agreement and those who did so half-heartedly. After the in camera meeting, we should have a discussion on how to approach the issue. In my opinion, we should invite stakeholders. How we proceed remains to be determined.

[English]

The Chair: Merci, Monsieur Paquette.

Monsieur LeBlanc.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chairman, I agree with Mr. Paquette's motion. Furthermore, I know that, as Mr. Menzies said earlier, nobody would consider jeopardizing the Canadian industry's interests by disclosing details of the negotiations.

[English]

I was a bit surprised when a journalist from *La Presse* said to me earlier this afternoon that he had been told by the Prime Minister's office that legislation was coming in the next week or two to implement this agreement; it would be, of course, confidence; and were we as Liberals going to support this legislation.

We can discuss that some other time, but the whole idea that a journalist is told that legislation is coming, and so on, would tell us that it's urgent that we get our heads around this issue so we can understand better what the industry and provinces are....

We've all spoken to people in the industry and to the provincial governments, but I think Mr. Paquette is right. Next week, if it's not possible on Monday, then at the latest on Wednesday, if the clerk is able to arrange it, let's have an in camera discussion with officials from the department—and the minister, in a perfect scenario—about what the framework agreement means and why they believe it's a good agreement. Then we can decide as a committee what public hearings we want to have from that point on.

• (1615)

The Chair: So you're suggesting we do that on Wednesday.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I would prefer Monday, but as Monsieur Paquette said, that's five days from now. If we can't do it on Monday, in order to not lose a week, and we can only have them a week from now on softwood lumber, let's have the general departmental briefing that Monsieur Lemieux alluded to, which we as critics had some weeks ago, sort of the overall context of Canada's.... Let's get that out of the way on Monday, so that by Wednesday at the latest we can begin to look at softwood lumber.

The Chair: Okay. So we would have the departmental officials do a general briefing on Monday and ask the minister if he can come on Wednesday.

Are you suggesting that we have an in camera meeting or a public meeting, Mr. LeBlanc?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I don't want to deviate from Monsieur Paquette's motion, which I would support. But as I understand it, if we have a meeting on Monday with departmental officials on the general trade context—as I said, opposition critics were given that briefing and it was very instructive—then by Wednesday, a week from today, we would have the in camera discussion with the minister, or senior officials if the minister is not available, on the details of the framework agreement in camera. Then we'd be in a position to decide what public steps could follow.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lemieux and then Mr. Julian, on this, and if we can move it to a question as soon as possible that would be great.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): I just want to echo what you said and what Mr. Cannan said. Being a new MP and a new member to the committee, I would appreciate starting with a departmental briefing. I'd like to know where they're coming from and what other issues might be on the table. I'd prefer to start it that way, rather than just launch right into one particular subject.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Following up on Mr. Paquette's points, I think we're saying that we'd like to have the minister here for an in camera meeting on either Monday or Wednesday, and the departmental briefing would take place on the other day, rather than saying that we're going to set aside Monday or Wednesday if the minister is available, which might put it off until the following week.

This is pressing public policy. It's something that has huge ramifications in my region of the country, and I know other members are affected as well.

I think that's what we're saying. I don't believe I'm misquoting Mr. Paquette. On either Monday or Wednesday we would have the in camera briefing and a discussion on how we're going to deal with this as a committee. The other day could be for the departmental briefing, which would include some of the other issues, such as the agreement of South Korea that was mentioned.

The Chair: Okay. Could we agree to this? We'll ask the minister to come on Monday or Wednesday. If we can't have the minister on Monday, then we can go ahead with a general departmental briefing on Monday. The first meeting with the minister will be an in camera meeting, and following that we will meet as a committee to decide where to take it from there. Fair enough?

Mr. Menzies.

Mr. Ted Menzies: On a point of clarification, this may be a question to the clerk on the protocol for demanding or asking the minister to attend. At this point, are we demanding that he has to attend or are we simply making a request?

My point is that it's very short notice. I'm concerned that his schedule is probably quite full. He may be in Washington working on a deal, and I don't want to interfere with that.

The Clerk: I'm going to check on whether he is available. If he is available, obviously, I think he will accept the invitation; if not, he will be replaced by a senior official.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Okay. It's an invitation, rather than a demand for him to appear.

The Clerk: I would say so.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Menzies, we've found in the past, of course, that sometimes ministers come on short notice, although rarely, if ever, would it be as short as we're asking here. We've also had times when we couldn't get the minister to come for a couple of months, and that's obviously unacceptable.

I think that as a committee we should encourage the minister to come as soon as he possibly can. We would like him to come next week. We will ask him whether he can attend next week and then take it from there, as agreed. Is that all right?

A voice: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much. It's agreed.

Is there any more business for the committee?

The next meeting of the committee will be on Monday at this time. You will get notice about the location. The time is the same time on Monday.

Seeing no other business...

Mr. Menzies.

• (1620)

Mr. Ted Menzies: I have one other point of business, and I think Mr. Paquette, Mr. Julian, and Mr. Eyking will back me up on this.

When we bring in witnesses, I would personally like to see small biographies on these individuals, and some of their previous works, previous writings, and comments, further ahead of the meeting. In the last session we were given briefings and articles that these people had written to get an idea of where their thoughts would be coming from so that we could frame some questions in our minds, but we were given them just as we were going into the meetings.

I would certainly like to have the opportunity to read those as soon as we can, whether they're sent electronically to our offices or not. I don't know what the timeframe is. I know you're busy, but that would help us to get the answers and the information out of these witnesses.

The Chair: Mr. Menzies, I will assure you that as chair of the committee I will be asking the clerk and the researchers to do exactly that. The committee is only going to be a better committee if the background information is received as far ahead of time as possible. On occasion that just won't be possible—

Mr. Ted Menzies: I understand.

The Chair: —but I really will push for that, and I appreciate you bringing that up.

Is there any more business?

Thank you very much. The meeting is adjourned.

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