



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, May 3, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Bob Mills

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• (1545)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Eugene Morawski): Honourable members, I see a quorum.

First of all, I'd like to introduce myself to the new members. I'm Eugene Morawski. I'll be the clerk of this committee.

With me is Chad Mariage, who is the new clerk of the natural resources committee. We'll be following each other around for the next couple of months.

Without further ado, our first order of business is the election of the chair. I'm prepared to take motions to that effect.

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): I wish to nominate Mr. Bob Mills.

The Clerk: Mr. Warawa, you nominate Mr. Mills.

Mr. Cullen, did you have another nomination?

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): No, I'll second that.

The Clerk: Seconded by Mr. Cullen.

Are there any other nominations?

I declare Mr. Mills elected chair of the committee. Congratulations.

At this moment, I can preside over the election of the vice-chairs, if you wish.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: Okay. Our first one would be nominations for the first vice-chair. I would be ready to take motions to that effect.

Mr. Godfrey.

Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.): I nominate Mr. Silva.

The Clerk: Mr. Godfrey nominates Mr. Silva as first vice-chair.

Are there any other nominations? Closed? Agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: Mr. Silva is elected the first vice-chair of the committee.

And now, for a second vice-chair, I'm prepared to take motions.

Monsieur Lussier.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): I nominate Mr. Bernard Bigras.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): I second the motion.

The Clerk: Mr. Lussier, seconded by Mr. Blaney, moves to nominate Mr. Bernard Bigras.

[English]

We don't have to second motions in committee, but we'll take that anyway.

Are there any other nominations?

I declare Mr. Bigras elected second vice-chair.

The Chair (Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC)): Thank you very much, gentlemen—seeing we have no ladies. We'll have to try to change that, guys.

Thank you very much for your support. It was a hard campaign. I want to thank my mother and.... Sorry, that's not right.

I guess our decision today would be on the routine motions, if we want to get those taken care of. I think everybody got a copy of those earlier. Some committees take care of those at this time, and some wait until the next meeting. I think it's just as well to take care of them. They're pretty routine.

Does anybody disagree with that?

Okay. The first one—Eugene, I think we'll just go through them as you have them—is in regard to the services of the Library of Parliament: that this committee retain a member of the Library of Parliament.

I see Tim sitting over here. I think a number of you are familiar with Tim, who certainly in the past has done a great job for us.

Would someone like to so move? Mr. Silva.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Next is that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be composed of... That's the steering committee. I might speak first just about that. I've been on committees where we've had a subcommittee, and I've been on committees where we haven't had a subcommittee. To follow in Charles Caccia's footsteps, he would suggest that the reason not to have a subcommittee—and I used to disagree with him violently—was the fact that you discuss things in a subcommittee, then you bring that to the committee, and then you discuss all the same things again as to what you want on the agenda and what you want to do.

That said, I leave that up to you. We could try not having that subcommittee, or you could make a motion and we could set up a subcommittee at this point.

Nathan.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'd move that we do, only based on the experience of the last committee. We didn't actually end up meeting that often but set out the course at key points in the calendar year.

I didn't detect a lot of disgruntlement from the different members. There were ways to influence the subcommittee either through your own party or through other parties. It seemed to work well last time. I think if we make the decisions there and then don't rehash the whole conversation at the committee level....

I can't remember how long our subcommittee meetings were, but they weren't long. Fifteen minutes every once in a while seemed to set the course, with Tim's help and others. It seemed to work well.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Nathan, are you making that a motion?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, I've made that a motion.

The Chair: Is there anyone else?

As I say, I've been on both, and it depends how it's handled, I guess.

Hon. John Godfrey: So under Tonks you had one?

The Chair: Under Tonks there was one, yes. Under Charles there was not one, basically because of the duplication. Who needs another meeting? And that seemed to work fairly well, as long as the committee members cooperated.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I presume you would be the one chairing the subcommittee—or would it be somebody else?

The Chair: I think that's normally how it has worked, yes.

Last year the committee decided to create a subcommittee on agenda and procedure, composed of the chair, both vice-chairs, the parliamentary secretary, and a representative of the New Democratic Party. That's how it was handled last year; that's the motion we passed last year.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Mario Silva: Would the subcommittee usually meet, say, 50 minutes before the meeting, or...?

The Chair: Well, yes. I think those were separate meetings, quite often.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Oh, yes, if not, there'd be no point.

The Chair: Yes, and then the recommendation of the subcommittee is brought to the committee. And as I said, sometimes in my experience you then discuss everything you had discussed in the subcommittee, thus having the same meeting over again, and that's a waste of time.

Mr. Mario Silva: I'm not aware of the tradition of the subcommittee because I believe we didn't have one at the heritage committee.

The Chair: No, many times you don't.

Mr. Mario Silva: So I would like to propose that we do not have one—either that or I vote against the motion.

The Chair: I think we need to vote on this motion first and either accept or defeat it and then we can entertain your motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm not following you.

[English]

The Chair: Pardon?

• (1550)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I was only saying that I don't understand.

I'm also recalling that I think the last time we only met a couple of times; it was just to set the course, because we were dealing with such a big topic, and it will likely be similar this time. We dealt with climate change last time, and we'll likely deal with CEPA here.

I just don't remember it being burdensome, and I thought it was just.... Making decisions in a group of twelve is more difficult than making decisions in a group of five.

The Chair: I know that Lee, from our party, and who was on it last time, did find it onerous to get to those meetings, and I think that was simply his comment to me.

Again, having been on committees with both ways, I know that in one committee we just really rehashed everything again anyway, and the subcommittee was almost just hung out to dry.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I chaired the Standing Committee on Official Languages during the last Parliament and we didn't have a subcommittee. We realized that the main committee could easily accomplish everything that needed to be done.

I agree that we have no need of a subcommittee.

[English]

The Chair: Bernard.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): I thought the role of the subcommittee was to set priorities for the future. I thought it acted as the steering committee, considered future business and reported back to the main committee.

You're right, Mr. Chairman. Quite often, the subcommittee drafted the report and it was discussed by the main committee. In my view, that's one committee too many. We're quite capable of working together and setting our agenda for the future, provided we take a disciplined approach to our work. I believe we can find some way to work together effectively and set priorities. In any event, our agenda seems quite straightforward and we have a fairly limited number of sittings scheduled. I think we can all come to an agreement on a common agenda.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: For clarification, Mr. Chair, if the committee deemed it necessary, if this motion were removed or doesn't carry, if we want to change and create the subcommittee, that should be our option in the future. That may be the direction we want to go in.

The Chair: Sure.

Are there any other comments?

So we need to vote on this. Do you want to still leave that standing?

Nathan.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes.

I'm still trying to figure out our last experience, which I can't remember, but of the members who were here before—Jeff, or others—was there ever any disgruntlement with the process or with how it worked?

The Chair: I'm talking about a committee other than the environment committee.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I think with the breadth and scope of the issues that we're going to have to deal with, setting priorities for what we do first and how much time we allot... When committee members had issues that they wanted to put on the agenda, they just approached the committee and said, "There's something in Fort McMurray I want to talk about." It's an amiable committee. It generally works.

The Chair: So does everybody understand the motion that Mr. Cullen is presenting, that we have a subcommittee? I don't know whether you want to include the wording of last time, Nathan.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's the spirit of it. It's the same idea.

The Chair: So basically we would be voting on having a clause like the one here that was read from last time.

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: So at that, we then carry on without that subcommittee at this point, and we'll discuss the agenda in the whole committee.

We move on to reduced quorum: that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least—and we need to decide the number—members are present, including...members of the opposition.

Last time we had five and two. Would someone like to move that or something different?

Mr. Mark Warawa: So moved, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay, so that will be five and two.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1555)

The Chair: The distribution of documents: that the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute to the members of the committee only documents that are available in both official languages.

An hon. member: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Working meals: that the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

An hon. member: So moved.

The Chair: I was explaining to a couple of new members that there are occasions when the time changes, so that right now our schedule is 3:30 to 5:30 Mondays and Wednesdays, unless other meetings are scheduled. There is the nine to eleven time slot, and then there is the eleven to one time slot. Obviously these meals would apply to the eleven to one time slot, when we get that one, or when we have special meetings held over a lunch hour. So that's what we'd be voting on here.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Witnesses' expenses: that, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation, and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses, not exceeding two representatives per organization, and that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the chair.

Again, as we come up with a list of witnesses, depending on our subject, of course, we invite them here and this would simply cover their expenses.

An hon. member: So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Staff at in camera meetings: that unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff person at an in camera meeting.

An hon. member: So moved.

The Chair: Are there any comments?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I want to be certain that when we speak of a staff person attending meetings, we also include here staff from the whip's office, not just Members' parliamentary assistants. I want assurances that even in the case of in camera meetings, "staff person" also includes a staff person in the whip's office.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think we always have. I don't see that as being a problem. Do you think that needs to be included? The clerk suggests we don't need to write that in; that's pretty much standard procedure.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Notice of motions: that the number of 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, and that the notice of motion be filed with the clerk of the committee and distributed to members in both official languages.

An hon. member: So moved.

The Chair: Our standard, I think, was 24 hours. Again, I know in some committees it's much longer than that, but I think we've always found 24 hours was a pretty reasonable length of time.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: In camera meetings transcripts: 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.

The Chair: Does anyone have a problem with that?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On time limits for statements and questioning, again I will go back to the former committee and suggest that the witnesses were given ten minutes to make their statements. We then had the first round of questions by one member from each party for ten minutes. Then we had five minutes for all future questions.

Nathan.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I don't know if this needs to be included in this part, but last time at committee there were times when we had five, six, or seven witnesses. At ten minutes apiece, with the limited time we had, we often ran out of time. I don't know if we need to include it in this motion or have it as a separate thing, but some accommodation for the chair, at the request of the committee or whatever process, to notify witnesses because of a large witness list—

The Chair: Reduce it to six minutes or—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Give them some notice, because often witnesses would come with a ten-minute prep. We'd say we're running out of time and shorten their actual words, which was frustrating. Either we limit the number of witnesses we see, or we—

The Chair: Eugene suggests that when he has a large number of witnesses he advises them and automatically reduces their time.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Oh, that happens. If that's the process—

The Chair: I think that's a reasonable concern.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It works for me.

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: In the case of the two committees on which I served, it was less than ten minutes. In one case, it was five minutes, and in the other, seven minutes. I think that's quite a bit of time, especially for a first round of questions. When each party is given ten minutes for the first round, 40 minutes elapse before we can move on to another topic, not to mention the 10 minutes allocated for the presentation. That means we're left with one hour.

Would committee members agree to seven minutes or five minutes for the first round of questions?

• (1600)

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Chairman, I think it would be to the Liberal Party's advantage to have 10 minutes for the first round, given that there are four Liberal members on the committee. If they are allocated 10 minutes, that will not leave much time for the third or fourth committee member. To my mind, the approach used thus far has allowed committee members to ask as many questions as possible. However, I do think it would be to your advantage to have 10 minutes for the first round of questions.

[English]

The Chair: Other members?

Hon. John Godfrey: If everybody asks, that means the initial round would be two hours.

The Chair: No. There would be ten minutes for yourselves, ten minutes for the Bloc, ten minutes for the NDP, ten minutes—that's the first round—per party.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: That's what I'm saying: 10 minutes per party. The Liberals would get 10 minutes, the Bloc Québécois, 10 minutes, and so on. The first round of questions would last 40 minutes.

[English]

The Chair: That's correct. Then the second round would be for five minutes. If you want to try it and see how it works, I think we generally found it worked pretty well. I don't think there were any major times....

To take a witness and shorten their time very much.... You sometimes bring them in from quite a distance at quite an expense, and it's pretty tough to tell someone they have five minutes to cover all they want to cover that you want to hear from them. That's a tough call.

Are there any questions or comments?

Mr. Mark Warawa: In the spirit of cooperation, we want to make sure every person also has an opportunity to ask a question before another member of the committee asks multiple questions of the witness.

I've sat on about three different committees. I've experienced the ten-minute first round and the five-minute first round. There are advantages to both, but in each case there were some problems when one member had multiple opportunities to ask questions before others were given a chance. So perhaps we could work into the policy and the procedure that everybody has a chance to ask a question before a member of a party has multiple opportunities.

The Chair: Well, we rotate. As I say, we go one, two, three, four, and then start the second round for five minutes. In the third round we go five, five, five, five—

I'm sorry, we alternate back and forth.

Hon. John Godfrey: I think the principle that members who haven't been heard from should have a crack at it before we go back to people who have been heard from is generally a good idea. Otherwise, with all respect to Nathan, you'd get four rounds before people began to—

Mr. Mark Warawa: Exactly.

The Chair: Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: When deciding on how to allocate time, we shouldn't assume that each committee member has to ask a question. In committee, we operate on a party basis. Given the composition of the committee, a certain number of seats are taken up by each political party and it's the responsibility of the Bloc Québécois, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party to manage the time allocated to their respective parties.

If each political party is allocated 10 minutes and each member gets two minutes, it's manageable, because you manage your own time. However, we needn't think that we have to wait until everyone has spoken to go to the next round. It's up to each political party to manage the time allocated to it.

[*English*]

The Chair: The other thing I would add is that again the chair's prerogative is that when he sees someone who just desperately wants to speak, we're not going to leave this room without that person having an opportunity to speak. If you happen not to have any friends in your own party and they won't let you speak, we'll make damn sure you get to speak.

Again, we haven't had any problems with that before. There are often times when within our ten minutes we would share five and five. That's fine. If someone goes seven minutes and there are three minutes left, someone else in your party can fill in the remaining minutes.

Can we give this a try and see how it works?

•(1605)

Hon. John Godfrey: All you're trying to do is to balance the rights of parties with the rights of individual members of Parliament.

The Chair: That's right.

Hon. John Godfrey: And we'll leave it in your capable hands.

The Chair: Is everyone in favour of that?

Mr. Mark Warawa: So, for clarification, the witness will be given ten minutes—

The Chair: The witness will be given ten minutes for an opening statement. At the discretion of the chair during the questioning of witnesses there will be allocated ten minutes for the first questioner of each party. Thereafter, five minutes will be allocated to each subsequent questioner, alternating between government and opposition parties.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I think that's basically all we have.

Our next meeting—

The Clerk: Our next meeting is on Monday, at 3:30, but we have nothing—

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: We're still on the same thing here, are we? We're talking about alternating between government and opposition parties.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I don't know how the other committees work, but in the last Parliament we were also a minority and the committee I was chairing did not alternate between government and parties all the time, because you have to take into consideration the fact that it's a minority government.

So we kept going around according to the percentage the parties got. That's how we did it at the official languages committee. That's how we did it at the heritage committee when I was there. I don't know how you guys did it in other committees.

The Chair: Again, we did it as written here, and as I say, I can't recall once where we had a problem.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Are you saying that we will always be alternating?

Mr. Bernard Bigras: The first party, the second party, the third party...

The Clerk: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: That's the problem. The government side goes first, followed by the opposition; then it's back to the government, and then to the other opposition party; finally, it's back to the government, and then to the third opposition party. Yet, the Conservatives have a minority government, just like the Liberals had. You want to allocate half of the time available to them. That's not right, because they're in a minority position.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: We're up after you.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: That's not what's written here. It notes that for the second round, the government and the opposition parties continue to alternate. It goes back and forth. Therefore, government members are allocated half of the available time.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Yes, after.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Given the proportion of Conservative members on the committee, why should they be allocated half of the available time?

Mr. Bernard Bigras: The greatest amount of time is allocated during the first round.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I don't recall us actually bouncing at the last committee on the second round. I recall it went two across and then four this way. Did we bounce back to the government every time?

The Chair: I think in many cases not every party wanted a turn. That happened many times with witnesses. Sometimes two opposition parties in a row would ask questions because no government members had questions. As I say, I can't recall that we had a single problem with any witness where someone didn't get their question asked. We just did not have that problem.

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: If we have a procedure for alternating back and forth, as has been laid out before us, with the numbers there will be a total of two people left out. Before it comes back into the sequence, those two outstanding people would be given an opportunity to ask questions. In that way, before everybody gets a chance, as we alternate back and forth between government and opposition, the two people left out would be given an opportunity to ask questions before it goes back into the cycle again. That would be quite fair.

• (1610)

The Chair: Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: That's up to you to decide. Each party has a responsibility to manage the time allocated to it and to decide who gets to ask questions. For instance, during the first round of questions, two Liberal Party members could ask questions, and then two more could have their turn during the subsequent round.

[*English*]

The Chair: As Mr. Bigras said, sometimes one of our members was the only one asking all of the questions on behalf of our party. It was the same thing with the government. Sometimes it was the parliamentary secretary, and sometimes it was Mr. Bigras. So I strongly suggest we proceed. If it doesn't work and we find we're running into problems, let's revisit it.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Based on ten for the first round and five for subsequent rounds, if you did three rounds, the opposition would have fifty out of eighty minutes. The government would have thirty minutes out of eighty minutes. I think that's fair.

The Chair: As I said, that part of it was never a problem.

Are there any other comments?

Is the motion carried?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: On division.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

(Motion agreed to on division)

Mr. Chair: Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I just have a question about the agenda. Are we setting that at the next meeting?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Are we meant to bring recommendations?

The Chair: I would suggest that.

Just before we break up, Mr. Cullen has asked a question about how we put forward.... As I recall, last time people sent in their recommendations. In other words, we came to the meeting with a list of what people were interested in. Certainly, as government, we have the things we are interested in doing. I think everybody recognizes that CEPA is something that is overdue. It was scheduled and didn't get dealt with. I expect most people here are going to agree that will probably be our first piece of business. Again, we can bring that back to the next meeting and discuss it.

I suggest that if people would like to give me a list of areas, I might be able to condense that to make the meeting go faster and more orderly, just as we did last time.

The Clerk: They can send their topics to me.

The Chair: You can send topics to the clerk. He can include them, and we can go from there.

Are there any other questions or comments?

The meeting is 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

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