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Standing Committee on Health

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Thursday, May 4, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Rob Merrifield

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•(1115)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Carmen DePape): Honourable members of the committee, we have a quorum.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(1), your first order of business is to elect a chair. I am now ready to receive nominations to that effect.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): I would like to nominate Rob Merrifield for chair.

The Clerk: Are there further nominations?

It has been moved by Mr. Fletcher that Mr. Merrifield be elected chair of the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: We'll now proceed to the election of the first vice-chair, who will be a member of the official opposition.

Are there any nominations to that effect?

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): I nominate Bonnie Brown.

The Clerk: Are there further nominations?

It has been moved by Ms. Sgro that Ms. Brown be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Ms. Brown elected as first vice-chair of the committee.

[Translation]

I am now ready to receive nominations for the position of second vice-chair. He or she must be from a party other than the official opposition.

[English]

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): I nominate Christiane Gagnon.

The Clerk: Are there further nominations?

[Translation]

It is moved by Ms. Priddy that Ms. Gagnon be elected vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further nominations?

Is it your pleasure to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Ms. Gagnon elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC)): First of all, I want to thank everybody for their confidence in me as chair. I appreciate that very much. I know that Bonnie and I worked together very closely in the last committee, and we expect that won't change at all.

Welcome to some of the new faces around the table. Hopefully it will be a very productive committee. That's certainly going to be our goal, to make it as non-partisan as possible while dealing with some of the issues in as aggressive a way as we possibly can, and to be able to move issues along for the betterment of all Canadians. That's the way we approached it before, and hopefully we can continue with that and be even more fruitful in this session.

I want to thank you. We have a lot of work to do. Today it's a matter of going through routine procedures. We want to get going with that.

Yes.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Excuse me, Mr. Chairman. Our clerk, Ms. DePape, proceeded to the election of the second vice-chair, but what happened to electing the first vice-chair? We have a co-chair, Ms. Brown. Should we not also have two vice-chairs? Ms. Brown is the co-chair, and Ms. Gagnon is the second vice-chair.

[English]

The Chair: That's right. First vice-chair is Ms. Brown and second vice-chair is Ms. Gagnon. That was all done. It may have happened very fast.

We should all have the routine motions in front of us. We'll start with number one, the services of analysts from the Library of Parliament.

We need a mover for that. Ms. Davidson moves it.

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

•(1120)

The Chair: Before we move on to the next motion, let's follow through on this one and introduce our staff. Let's have them join us at the table.

First of all, we'd like to invite our analysts from the Library of Parliament to join us. This is a couple we know very well at this committee.

Nancy Miller Chenier and Sonya Norris, it's good to have you with us again.

I think those who were on the committee previously can speak to how valuable these two ladies are to us as a committee in terms of the work they do and how hard they work to try to facilitate the work of the committee. We do appreciate that.

I understand that you want to introduce some others who we will have as resources to the committee.

Mrs. Nancy Miller Chenier (Committee Researcher): Thank you very much for inviting us to come and serve you again. It's always a challenge and a pleasure.

In addition to Sonya and me, a couple of other analysts are available to the committee should members need assistance with any of their work. We have Odette Madore, an economist, and Marlisa Tiedemann, a lawyer. This rounds out our skills. Sonya is a scientist, and I come from the political and social side of things.

We hope you'll use our services and that you'll think you're well served.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sure we will be well served. We look forward to the good work that we'll all do together.

Back to routine procedures, number two, the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. Do we have a motion in regard to the subcommittee?

Madam Demers moves that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure—

Okay, Ms. Brown.

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): A question, Mr. Chairman. This committee has always operated as a committee of the whole. I'm wondering, is it your wish as the new chair to have this, to have what is essentially a steering committee?

As I explained in other times, it seems to me that when you have a steering committee trying to make these decisions, the decisions often have to be totally rehashed at the full committee anyway. Sometimes it becomes a little bit of a waste of time. Very often the committee reverses the choice of the members of the subcommittee.

So if you want to have this, as the new chair it's your prerogative. I know that this is the kind of regular motion that's put forward by the clerk. Or did you ask for this motion?

The Chair: No, this is a motion that's regularly put through by the clerk. I realize what we did in the last committees. I think we want some debate on that. I think it's appropriate for you to voice those concerns. We can open the floor to any other debate on it.

Mr. Batters.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations on your election and to the other chairs as well.

Ms. Brown's point is well taken. Often you can debate things at a steering committee and then have to rehash them again at the full

committee. I guess that is the pitfall. However, if we determine that this is the best way to go—this is a new Parliament with a new chair and new officials—perhaps we can get off on a fresh footing and have these matters successfully resolved by the steering committee. Once they were resolved at the steering committee with appropriate representation, the decision would be made and wouldn't have to be rehashed here at the full committee. We would empower the steering committee to make these decisions. That would be my recommendation. Of course, we're adequately represented on the steering committee by members of the opposition parties as well.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Fletcher.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Well, actually, Bonnie, it looks as if I'm going to be in agreement with you. I think the way you did it or that it happened last time worked out fine. Your point about things being rehashed is well taken, because that may be what happens anyway.

The other advantage of doing it as a whole is that everything's done in a transparent and thorough way, and everyone has a certain amount of input. Certainly we did proceed with the agenda in that way.

So it looks as if we're off to a good start, Ms. Brown.

The Chair: Madam Gagnon.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): I am familiar with both systems. In 1993, the Human Resources Committee had a steering committee. However, prior to the last election, the Human Resources and Social Development Committee operated as a committee of the whole. Matters did not progress any faster when we dealt with them as a committee of the whole, rather than referring them to a subcommittee. But, it is for the chair to decide how we should proceed. I would say, however, that it is a fallacy to assert that matters move more swiftly when we operate as a committee of the whole. On several occasions, it took us longer to reach a consensus on certain matters. It is a decision for the chair to make. Personally, I preferred working as part of a subcommittee; it meant that we had a better understanding of the matter when we brought it back before the committee of the whole. Some decisions were made by the committee, but some work had already been initiated by the subcommittee. It means that there are no stumbling blocks when it comes to presenting the facts to the committee of the whole. Bear in mind that, often, some members of the committee are not able to attend meetings. When some committee members only attend one or two working sessions, it makes it harder to get a handle on the issues. There are all sorts of reasons why some members are unable to attend certain meetings. The steering committee was also able to make sure that we followed up on important issues.

Mr. Chairman, I would prefer to have a steering committee, but if the majority of members are contrary-minded, I am happy to go with the flow.

•(1125)

[English]

The Chair: Before we add any more discussion, because we can get bogged down on a little issue, in a sense, why don't we...? This is a routine procedure. It's allowing for a subcommittee if it's needed, not that we should necessarily exercise it all the time, or maybe even very often. As the chair, I certainly wouldn't see this being exercised very much. But if at any time it could be exercised to help facilitate moving the committee's work forward, that would be an appropriate time for it, and only then, rather than routinely or all the time.

That's how I would see it, if it were passed this way. I hope that solves both sides a little bit. That's the way I would see proceeding.

Bonnie.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: I'm not wedded to either format, and whatever you prefer, Mr. Chair, is fine with me.

The reason I raised the question is that when I first came here, the subcommittee on agenda and procedure, known as the steering committee, actually did control the agenda for the most part, whereas we did it differently for one specific reason: so that we would not have what I called the tier-one members controlling the agenda and the tier-two members not having much input into the agenda. We did it by a system whereby everybody could submit their ideas of subjects they'd like to study, etc. Then we ranked them to be sure that the agenda we were following was indeed a consensual one. So there wasn't an A-team and B-team. It was really to make sure that new members in particular felt totally a part of the process. That's why I questioned this motion.

However, I trust the chair, who has experienced that more open democratic method of engaging all members, if we do pass this, not to use it all the time, but to still give every member of the committee access to the agenda.

The Chair: Since you're part of this steering committee, you could make sure of it. So I think it's pretty safe.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Chair, you've put forward some consensus building here. I suggest we call the question.

The Chair: Okay. We have a motion. I don't want to cut anyone off, but I think we've exhausted this.

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

•(1130)

The Chair: This takes us to number three, reduced quorum. This is standard in all committees. I'll open the floor to discussion. If not, I'll open the floor to a motion.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: It is so moved.

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

The Chair: The next is number four, distribution of documents. Again, we'll open the floor. Any discussion? If not, we'd entertain a motion.

We have a motion on the floor to accept this as a motion. Any discussion on the motion? I see none.

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

The Chair: The fifth is working meals. Oh, now we're getting to the important stuff. Did you have any comments on this? This is a standard one as well.

We have a motion by Mr. Dykstra. Any discussion on the motion? No.

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

The Chair: Let's go on to number six, time limits for witnesses statements and questions.

We have before you a proposal that was exercised in the last committee—I think that's what the clerk just said—and we followed it this way. If we want to make any changes or we're comfortable with it, then we can speak now. We'll open the floor to discussion or a motion.

Discussion?

We'll go with Ms. Priddy.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It seems that particularly in the second part, where the amount of time allowed to question the minister is different for the official opposition and other parties, this is somewhat different from the regulations of other committees. If there's some reason for that, I'd like to know; if not, I would put forward a motion that the amount of time be equal.

The Chair: So you're talking about the first 15 minutes going to the official opposition, and you think it should be 10-10-10-10. Is that your motion?

Ms. Penny Priddy: Yes, or 15-15, whatever amount is equal.

The Chair: Well, 15-15 gets to be too much time. I just want to clarify what you want.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Yes, that's correct.

The Chair: Okay, so you want to change the 15 to 10? That's fine.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: I think she wants to amend a motion, but you have to get this motion moved first before you can accept an amendment.

The Chair: This isn't actually tabled. The clerk is saying it's not moved yet. So it could be part of the new moving, if anyone wants to move it.

So will we have discussion or a motion?

Ms. Nicole Demers: Discussion.

The Chair: Okay, we'll have a quick discussion, and then we'll entertain a motion.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I think that there is an error in the French version of the first paragraph, which reads as follows: "and that subsequent questions be alternately shared between government members and members of the opposition party, at the discretion of the chair." It should read opposition parties, and not opposition party.

[English]

The Chair: The clerk agrees. She'll make the change.

Ms. Gagnon.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Normally, questions are not alternately shared, at the discretion of the chair, for the second round. Or, at least, that was not how it was done in the committees on which I have sat. The second round starts again with the official opposition, followed by the Bloc, then the government, then the NDP. I think that this is a fairer way of proceeding.

The order could be at the discretion of the chair for the third round. This would give you a certain latitude for determining who got the floor.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, I hear what you're saying.

There's more discussion on this. We'll go to Mr. Fletcher, and then—

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Actually, I'd like to let Mr. Batters go first.

The Chair: Mr. Batters.

Mr. Dave Batters: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In the 38th Parliament, this was actually a hot topic of discussion in the transport committee. What we ended up doing as a practice was to really make an effort to replicate in committee the proportional representation of the Parliament and of these committees. There's a reason there is x number of members in each committee, and that is to reflect the distribution of the Parliament.

If we were to do it the way Ms. Gagnon suggests, where the second round mirrors the first, what would happen is that you would have a member repeating—in this case, it would be Ms. Priddy of the New Democratic Party—getting a second question before other members get to ask their first question.

So my recommendation, and this is what we ended up doing at transport, is that every single member who wishes to speak should have the opportunity to be heard first before the chair begins to recognize at his discretion. In that Parliament, Ms. Desjarlais would get a second opportunity to speak before other members, which didn't respect the distribution of this place in the Parliament or in the committee.

I do have an alternate suggestion. I'd like to hear how best to put this forward. I'll just list this off and we'll see if the members of the committee are agreeable to this.

In terms of order of questions—and I'm receptive to whichever, it being seven minutes or ten minutes—the first round would go to the Liberals, then to the Bloc Québécois, then to the NDP, and then to the Conservative Party. The second round, then, at five minutes, would go to the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, the Bloc, and then back to the Conservative Party. That ensures that every member gets an opportunity to speak, but you may want to put that in writing, that every member who wishes to speak has that opportunity.

The third round, then, at five minutes, would go to the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, the Liberal or Conservative chair, or the last member, and then to the Bloc or the NDP if time allows.

I do have this written out, Mr. Chair, if I could pass this on to the clerk.

• (1135)

The Chair: It's just giving a snapshot of what you're trying to say, is it?

Mr. Dave Batters: A basic concept is that every member should have an opportunity to speak before another member gets a second kick at the can, as it were.

The Chair: Just to clarify what I'm hearing you say, if you're going to follow that, the first round would be as laid out—and whether it's seven or ten minutes, it doesn't matter—and then after that it alternates until everyone who wants to speak has had an opportunity to do so.

Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Dave Batters: Sorry, could you just recap that one more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Okay. The first round would be as was laid out, whether it's ten minutes or seven minutes. So it would be ten, five, five.

Mr. Dave Batters: What that is is a sample suggestion, Mr. Chair. The only point I would like to see adopted by the committee is simply the principle that every elected representative at this committee gets to speak before another representative speaks twice, and however we'd like to word that.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Mr. Fletcher, and then Ms. Brown.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: I'd like to support Mr. Batters in that suggestion. I think that is the appropriate thing to do.

And if I could just make a suggestion, it is that if the lead speaker on the Liberal side wanted to split their time they be allowed to do so.

The Chair: Fair enough. So that's following what we have in the past, with the principle that everyone speak before somebody speaks twice.

Ms. Brown.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Thanks.

I can see what Mr. Batters is doing. This particular complicated motion took us about three meetings to agree on in the last Parliament, and I know this is a new Parliament.

I'm going to respond to Ms. Gagnon first, who wanted to do two rounds in the formal order, whereas we agreed to only do one and then begin to alternate. The purpose of that was to make sure government members did get a turn.

I'm not willing to support the idea that everybody speaks once before somebody speaks twice, because the government has the power, and therefore, this is one place where the opposition parties often get a slight advantage in time. There's nothing wrong with that, as long as all the government members get into the discussion before the meeting is over.

This took a long time to work out, and to reduce the official opposition to seven minutes from the ten that we've had before, and that you had, and also to say that all members speak once before anybody speaks twice, would be quite a reversal of the traditions of all committees, not just this one.

So I'm speaking in support of the motion that is printed here. But, Mr. Chair, I'm finding the order rather odd, because it seems to me that you get a motion moved before you start looking at alternate things.

• (1140)

The Chair: Yes. I was just going to say we've discussed it enough now and I'd entertain a motion, if you want to make that.

Do you want to make that, Ms. Brown?

Ms. Bonnie Brown: I'll move the motion that's on the paper.

The Chair: So we have a motion on the paper right now. The reason I allowed the discussion is to try to get some consensus prior to it, but we've got a motion on the floor now, so now we're debating that motion.

The motion is as is on the paper. Is that correct?

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Yes, that's correct.

The Chair: Now, we open the floor to debate on the motion.

Yes, Ms. Priddy.

Ms. Penny Priddy: It seems we've probably really had the debate on the motion and done this a bit backwards, but my concern is not the amount, but the opportunity for there not to be a difference between the number of minutes allowed. We all have a position to put forward and views to put forward, and the fact that we don't have as many members in the House doesn't mean that you exponentially work out how many members and how many minutes.

My point to this would be that, whether it's 10 or 15, or whatever it is, they be equal amongst parties.

The Chair: Are you speaking for or against the motion?

Ms. Penny Priddy: Against.

The Chair: Against the motion.

Mr. Dykstra.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: In regard to Ms. Brown's comments, while I understand in terms of the second, I think they're somewhat inconsistent with how you spoke about whether or not we should have a steering committee, in the sense that everyone who sits on the committee deserved equal opportunity to put forward ideas, to put forward concepts, to put forward issues that we may speak on.

I think that your logic in reference to a steering committee is not different from what we're saying here: that everyone should have an equal opportunity, as a member of the committee, to speak. I think the motion doesn't actually allow that.

The Chair: It's on the amendment, and if you're speaking against it—unless you want to entertain an amendment—then I would suggest.... If not, is there any other discussion on the motion on the floor?

Mr. Rick Dykstra: I would simply suggest that the amendment would be contrary to the motion, so it would probably have to be defeated and another motion be put forward.

The Chair: There is no amendment. All we're dealing with is the motion that's on the floor.

The motion is on the floor, so it's a yea or nay on the motion on the floor.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: All I'm saying is that if I were to move an amendment, the amendment would be that I support the concept of each member having equal opportunity to speak at committee, which I think is contrary to the motion.

The Chair: Okay. Fair enough.

Discussion?

Ms. Penny Priddy: I do have an amendment, but the first amendment would take priority.

The Chair: There's no amendment here.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Was it not an amendment? Okay.

Then my amendment to this would be that all parties are given equal time in speaking.

The Chair: All parties are given equal time in speaking. So that's against the intent of this motion. We can't accept that as an amendment, I don't believe.

Ms. Penny Priddy: All right.

Mr. Dave Batters: We have an amendment, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, maybe in keeping with a good spirit here in starting off this 39th Parliament in the health committee, maybe just about all members of the committee would be agreeable to the idea of keeping everything as it is except for the last part, which says "and that subsequent questions be alternately shared between government and opposition members, at the discretion of the Chair."

I would move an amendment to say "and that subsequent questions ensure that all members of the committee wishing to speak have the opportunity to do so, and after such time questions be alternately shared between government and opposition members, at the discretion of the Chair".

That's all we're trying to do here. We're very flexible in terms of the amount of time and the fact that the official opposition gets the two first spots. We're simply trying to ensure that every member of the committee is able to put forward his or her views before another member speaks twice. And the crux of this—at least in the committee I was part of in the last Parliament—really becomes the New Democratic Party, in that there is a reason why we have different numbers of Liberal members, Bloc Québécois members, and NDP members. And regarding Ms. Priddy, as much as I've enjoyed her interventions in the House and know that she's going to have a very valuable input to this committee, I don't believe she should be allowed to speak twice before members who haven't even spoken for a first time.

That's my amendment, Mr. Chair.

• (1145)

The Chair: Okay. We have an amendment on the floor now.

I'm just trying to get some consensus, and I'm wondering if the mover would accept a friendly suggestion, and maybe the amender would as well, that we leave it the same as it is up to "Chair", and then add after that "with a principle" or "with the spirit of allowing all members who wish to speak that opportunity". That really is what I believe you're saying, and it's not changing anything other than giving this motion the intent of everyone being equal on this.

Is that fair?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I do not think so.

[English]

The Chair: I have a question then for the mover of the amendment. Would you be satisfied with that as your amendment? All right.

Now, we're debating the amendment.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Chairman, last year, government members, who were at that time opposition members, were extremely satisfied with the way in which this committee operated. As far as I know, there were never any complaints. Our chair was extremely impartial and objective. When members who had not yet spoken expressed a desire to do so, they were given the floor. Could we not continue in the same manner, as opposed to binding ourselves to a specific order of questioning for the third round?

Contrary to what Mr. Batters was saying, it could well happen that a member has not finished his or her line of questioning and that, even if he had the opportunity to do so, he would not be allowed to take the floor again because the last round would be exclusively for those members who had not yet spoken. If, one day, only six members were to attend the committee as opposed to the usual number, would we have to hear them all before taking the floor for a second time? That is not right, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: Yes. I'm starting to get a little phobic, as the chair, around this area.

I'm suggesting to you that when you really put in the principle of everybody being equal in a sense of wanting to speak and being able to speak on an issue, that gives me the discretion. I intend to make sure that everybody who wants to speak or has questions that are appropriate will have the opportunity to do so. That's really what I think we're arguing about.

I don't think what you're saying is really different from what is here. We're actually saying it's the same as the last time, with the principle that everybody has a fair and open opportunity.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: If you recall, Mr. Chair, as the meeting was coming to an end, people who had a turn were asked if they would pass to somebody who didn't have a turn, and that always worked. In the early part of the meeting, you'd follow the rules, and then

towards the end, the chair tries to make sure everybody gets in. I think that's the spirit of what they're saying.

The Chair: Yes, I think so. I don't think we've changed much. I don't think we're actually very far apart. In fact, I don't think we're apart at all.

If we have a small amended line carrying the principle and an amended motion, first, on the amendment, all those in favour?

(Amendment agreed to)

• (1150)

The Chair: On the amended version, the clerk asked me if we wanted that same principle to carry on in the second paragraph.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Have we voted on the amendment?

The Chairman: Yes, we have.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: I am not in favour of the amendment. I did not realize that we were voting on the amendment.

[English]

The Chair: Were you for it?

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: No.

The Chair: We recorded you as against it. There were three against it, and the rest were for it.

On going back to it for clarification, I don't know if we should open it up again. Let's just leave it.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Motion 7, witnesses' expenses, is standard. Could we entertain a motion?

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): I so move that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. The motion is on the floor. Is there any discussion on the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Motion number 8 is on staff at in camera meetings. This was an issue that had some debate the last time. This is different from what we practised the last time. I think the last time we said there could only be a staff member if a member could not be in attendance.

We have this motion. We would entertain a mover.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Do you want to do this one first, or do you want an alternate?

The Chair: I got into a little trouble the last time by not entertaining a motion. If you want to deal with it that way, we can.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Chairman, could we add the words "of his party" after the words "staff person"?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, we're animals of our own destiny. With this motion, we can amend it however we see fit.

For clarification, maybe we can have the clerk read the one we had before, and then we can debate it.

The Clerk:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each Committee member be allowed to have one staff person present at in camera meetings only when the member himself or herself is absent for a documented reason.

The Chair: I think the issue on this was how many staff we actually allowed in the room when we went in camera, and we didn't allow any unless a member had written permission to have them there. I feel this is a little tight, but it's up to you. It's not a big issue from my perspective, but we'll open the floor to debate on that.

Mr. Dave Batters: Debate, or can we move the motion?

The Chair: Moving the motion would be better.

Mr. Dave Batters: I move that we adopt this motion as written here, regardless of what happened in the 38th Parliament.

The Chair: We have a motion on the floor. If Madame Gagnon would like to amend that, then we would open the floor to an amendment.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: That's an accepted amendment? All right.

So is everyone clear, first on the amendment, or is that seen as a friendly amendment?

Mr. Dave Batters: Do we have to vote on the amendment, then?

The Chair: No. So then it's on the amended motion.

Is everyone clear on it? Maybe I'll have the clerk read it out.

The Clerk: In English, it would be: "That, unless otherwise ordered, each Committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff person"—from his or her party, I guess—"at in camera meetings"—something like that.

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

• (1155)

Ms. Bonnie Brown: That will eliminate all the fun from our meetings, when people are listening outside.

The Chair: The chair would like to get a little aggressive in committee, but I can't disclose anything that happened in camera.

Motion 9 deals with in camera meeting transcripts. That's very standard. We'd entertain a motion to accept motion 9.

Mr. Dykstra moves it. Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Motion 10, on notice of motions, is our last one. This is a 48-hour rule, and Friday is to be deemed the same as Monday.

We ran into a little trouble on this one.

The Clerk: Yes. This is the standard motion except for that part, where it says notice given on Friday is considered to be given on Monday.

That's what we had in the previous Parliament, but I put it in.

The Chair: Okay. So this is custom fit to address some of the problems we had last time.

Is there any discussion on that? Or we can entertain a motion, actually.

Mr. Dave Batters: I'll move that as written.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Before we quit, we have a notice of motion by Ms. Gagnon.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Chairman, I would like to table a motion. I want the Minister of Health to appear before the committee to discuss the negotiations that were held, in the context of a Memorandum of Understanding, on the people who were infected with AIDS or hepatitis C.

Negotiations are currently underway, and we receive a high number of calls from people wanting to know where things stand and whether they will be compensated in the near future.

This week, in the House, a member of the New Democratic Party asked a question of the Minister of Health on this matter. Our party also has similar questions for him. We want to know where the negotiations stand. The victims are very concerned.

We realize that your government has made a commitment on this matter; we just want to know the state of play.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to ask the parliamentary secretary to address this, because I do know the minister is keen to come to the committee and answer some of those.

Mr. Fletcher.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: I'd like to reassure the member and the victims that the Conservative Party is committed to its campaign promise. I'm not sure that, given the situation, if we brought the minister forward, he would be able to answer specific questions, but the minister has already indicated that he would like to come to the committee on June 6, if the committee so wishes. I guess at that time you could ask any questions you wish, including the ones you have just mentioned.

So there is no need for a formal motion. He's coming on June 6, if the committee will have him.

The Chair: His schedule is clear, so he's coming.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: I believe the situation to be of the utmost urgency. The victims are at the end of their tether. Some may even die before the negotiations are completed. There is also the matter of the compensation fund. The lawyers are still holding negotiation meetings, but it is a very costly process. The victims are extremely concerned, and want to know how negotiations on the compensation fund are advancing.

I am confident that the minister would be able to quickly bring us up to speed on the matter. It has to be handled as a separate issue. We have many questions for the minister on many different subjects. I think that we should move ahead quickly. We have the opportunity to show that the committee is treating this as a priority, as the victims, who are still waiting for answers, have asked.

I am confident that you are acting in good faith, sir.

•(1200)

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. Why are we debating a notice of motion?

The Chair: We aren't. We're just laying before the committee the point that the minister is coming on June 6, and really, we don't need any more discussion on that. You're absolutely right. It's a notice of motion; we'll debate it in 48 hours. So we'll leave it at that.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Chair, just one point. It's not—

The Chair: No, I'm sorry. You can debate that at the next meeting. That's fine.

What is the agenda for the next meeting? Let's just debate this for a second or two. The next meeting will be next Tuesday. There are some issues from the last time the committee met that have not been addressed that perhaps we could have department people come in to address.

There is one that strikes me. You'll remember that we had a long debate on a private member's bill on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. We had the department come forward with a comprehensive plan on how to deal with it. We chased them out of the room, basically, and they were to come back again, and that never did happen.

I'm wondering whether the committee would be interested in having them back, maybe Tuesday—is that possible?—to lay before the committee where they are on that plan. We can do this motion at that time as well. Is that fair?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Chairman, I would also like you to give consideration to following up on the matter of breast implants. There has been no follow-up on this matter. A report was published in January 2006. One of the companies that is planning to manufacture breast implants is currently under criminal investigation in the United States. I think that those in charge of this file should be called before the committee again.

[English]

The Chair: Would that be fair, to perhaps have our researchers investigate that for our Thursday meeting?

A voice: Did you want to call any witnesses, though?

The Chair: I don't know. Do we want witnesses or do we just want the department? What would you like?

Ms. Penny Priddy: I would like to at least have the department.

The Chair: You at least want to have the department come in on Thursday. Okay.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: It seems to me that a two-hour meeting could accommodate...[Inaudible—Editor]...in the first hour of the meeting and the other in the second hour. No?

The Chair: It doesn't give us a lot of time for the spectrum disorder, but I'm game to go with that kind of aggressiveness if the committee so wishes. But it might be spreading one or the other of those issues, not giving them a fulsome hearing, especially since we're trying to do them in one meeting.

Ms. Bonnie Brown: Okay, whatever you think, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are we happy with that as an agenda? I'm just trying to get some consensus.

So on Tuesday we'll be dealing with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and on Thursday there will be an update on the breast implant problem.

We'll have Madame Gagnon, and then we'll go to...

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Chairman, we have spent a great deal of time talking about future business. We do not have much time before the break week, which runs from the 15th to the 23rd. We do not know when we are going to be able to meet. Are we going to have a meeting to discuss future business, or are we going to make a decision today as to our priority from here until we adjourn? The list of subjects requiring study and follow-up is fairly substantial. Are you planning on holding a meeting to discuss our program between now and when we adjourn?

[English]

The Chair: I agree with you. All I was trying to do was to lay out next week. I do know that we need to plan for those issues.

Perhaps at the end of Tuesday's meeting, if there's time, or at Thursday's meeting we could have further discussion of future business. We can either meet as a steering committee or set out some time as a committee to deal with that.

Mr. Batters.

Mr. Dave Batters: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You voiced concern about fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, for the meeting on Tuesday. I'm just wondering if you could consult briefly with our learned analysts and the clerk as to whether that would be enough time. We'd like to finish the work on that before going to the issue raised by Ms. Demers.

Is there enough time? I'd like to hear from the analysts and the clerk on that.

The Chair: Do you want to give your input on FASD?

•(1205)

Mrs. Nancy Miller Chenier: Sure.

If you have a session next week on FASD, the idea would be to call the Public Health Agency representatives—assuming they can come; it may be short notice.

If you wanted to do a more detailed study, you would want to have some people from the non-governmental organizations who have been involved with this issue. There is an alcohol strategy currently under way that incorporates parts of FASD.

The committee has to decide whether they want it to be a one-time information update meeting or whether they would like it to be a more substantive study.

The Chair: I would suggest that after the Tuesday meeting we'd be in a better position to determine that. I know there's some legislation coming forward.

Mr. Fletcher.

Mr. Steven Fletcher: I know there has been discussion within the department on this issue. Raising an expectation that they can come on Tuesday may not be realistic, and I would just draw the committee's attention to that possibility. Don't hold your hopes too high.

A voice: Could we have Thursday as the fallback?

The Chair: Let's follow through and see. It will be interesting to see the department duck on this one.

Madam Priddy.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Thank you. I may ask some questions that new kids on the block ask, since I have not sat at this table before.

This is with regard to how we would prioritize looking at the areas of interest that people have. I'm not in any way wishing to suggest that one person's interest is more important or less important. They are all important. Some areas, however, have more timeliness attached to them. I'm thinking of the breast implant decisions that are coming down.

I'm wondering whether in the past the timeliness of the issue was taken into consideration with regard to the work done at the health committee. I'm wondering whether the timeliness of the issue also has some impact on how we take on that work. In an election campaign, for instance, you'd say there's no point putting up signs after the election is over. In the same way, there's no point taking on an issue after decisions have been made that are irrevocable.

Could you give me some understanding of that, please?

The Chair: From my understanding, these two issues left over were commitments. The first one was a commitment from the department.

Ms. Penny Priddy: No, I understand that.

The Chair: We're a long way along on that one. I think it's very timely. They've even had extra time to deal with that as a department.

On the second one, it is quite relevant. We had an issue that was brought forward. I believe Madam Demers spearheaded that issue. I believe it is timely to get an update as to what went on. We were actually interrupted on that issue by the election call.

I think we need some update, and I think it would be quite timely.

Ms. Penny Priddy: I'm not sure I'm understanding your answer. More likely, I'm not asking my question clearly enough.

The Chair: I thought you were asking whether these two issues that we decided next week...were of value as far as timeliness is concerned.

Ms. Penny Priddy: No. I mean, they clearly are, and I realize they were left over. I'm talking about as a general principle when we look at those issues. Do we look at ones that, if we leave them for four months, are too late to talk about because the decision has passed?

The Chair: That's future business discussion, and we'll deal with that next week, on Tuesday.

Madam Gagnon.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: There will probably be a vote in the House on Monday on the bill dealing with the Public Health Agency of Canada. The bill will then be referred to committee. Do you know whether it will be referred to the committee before we adjourn? We are going to have to summon witnesses. I imagine that this is what the committee will have to address in the immediate future.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's a good point. I think you should be preparing suggestions for witnesses as we take that piece of legislation forward. When legislation comes to committee, it takes precedence. Once that piece of legislation comes, it likely will take care of the next little while.

Mr. Fletcher and then Mr. Batters.

● (1210)

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Chair, I think we have members of the official opposition.... It looks like this meeting may be wrapping up. We have the agenda, the Standing Orders; perhaps these issues would be better dealt with on Tuesday, when we've had the vote, and when we have a better idea of what the future may be.

The Chair: Yes, I think that's right, and that's what I said.

Mr. Dave Batters: That was going to be my formal recommendation, Mr. Chair. I would ask that you maybe report back to the entire committee on Tuesday on your vision for planning of future business, whether that be in the full committee or whether that be in the steering committee, which may be a great venue for these discussions, to hash out some of these issues.

If you could get back to us on Tuesday with your vision of how this is going to work, it would help all members of the committee.

The Chair: Sure.

Thank you. I declare the meeting over.

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