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Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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Thursday, May 4, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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• (0910)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Lafrance): I see a quorum.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106, the committee can now proceed to the election of the chair.

I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Brown.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): I nominate Dean Allison for the position of chair.

The Clerk: Mr. Patrick Brown proposes Mr. Dean Allison.

Thank you, sir.

Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Dean Allison duly elected chair of the committee.

Before inviting Mr. Allison to take the chair, the committee will now proceed to the election of vice-chairs.

[Translation]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): I nominate Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours for the position of Vice-Chair.

The Clerk: Mr. Geoff Regan moves to nominate Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours for the position of first Vice-Chair.

[English]

Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Monsieur D'Amours duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106, the committee will now proceed with the election of the second vice-chair, who must be, according to the Standing Orders, a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

[Translation]

Ms. Bonsant.

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): I nominate Mr. Yves Lessard.

[English]

The Clerk: Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Monsieur Lessard duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

I now invite Mr. Allison to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): We'd like to take care of some routine motions today, if that's possible. Is everyone in agreement with that? Let's distribute those motions. We can have a look at them and try to get them passed.

Two sets of motions are being handed out. One is standard and the other includes the routine motions that were dealt with in this committee in the last Parliament. We can work from either copy, or we can work from the routine motions that were adopted by the previous committee. Then we just have the standard routine motions there as well, as a form of reference.

The third piece of paper you should have is a notice of motion from Ms. Yelich.

We have a proposal right now to look at the routine motions adopted by the committee in the 38th Parliament. One of the recommendations—you can move that in a second—is that we adopt all of the first 12. So if you want to make that motion....

Does anyone want to have a discussion on that?

Mr. Lessard.

• (0915)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): I will move the motion, Mr. Chairman. I'd also like to add something further.

I move that the procedural motions adopted be the same as those adopted for the 38th Parliament. Next, I'd like to move a motion that the staff persons accompanying us need not necessarily be from our office. These individuals could be party staff persons. This would ensure that we are accompanied by the appropriate person when working here in committee. In any case, I hereby move my motion respecting the resolutions adopted in connection with the 38th Parliament.

[English]

The Chair: We have a motion on the floor that we accept motions 1 to 12 of the 38th Parliament. Is there any discussion on that?

Hon. Geoff Regan: I thought Mr. Coderre proposed the first 12 of the standard routine motions. They're different from those of the 38th Parliament, so I'm not sure which ones he had in mind. There are a few differences, although they are minor.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): I was supporting the ones from the 38th Parliament. I don't have an problem with them, frankly, when I read them all. We have to discuss the 13th one because it changed, but I think we should proceed with the first 12.

The Chair: So the motion we have on the floor from Mr. Coderre is on items 1 to 12. Do we have any more discussion on that?

Yes, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Just on number 4, I want to make the chair aware, and those who weren't here in the last Parliament, that the subcommittee never actually met, and I hope that in this Parliament we will indeed meet and do the work that is expected of us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): That would be my question. What did it do and what will it do? I realize it's the agenda and procedure, but if you didn't meet and you weren't needed, what would then be the purpose of having it?

The Chair: My thought would be that it would kind of act as a steering committee, as it has in other committees. We could do that. We'll make some recommendations that are going to have to be accepted by the group as a whole.

The motion on the table is that we accept motions 1 to 12, routine motions adopted by the committee in the 38th Parliament.

Is there any more discussion on that? All those in favour?

(Motions 1 to 12 inclusive agreed to)

The Chair: That will move us to the 13th motion, which we need to discuss. I believe we also have a motion from Ms. Yelich.

Let's deal with motion 13. Is there any discussion on motion 13? Keeping in mind that motion 13 was based on the fact that the Conservative Party was in opposition, we would probably need to change the Conservatives and the Liberals around. Are there any comments on that?

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes. In the last Parliament, we and the Bloc actually got some questions in the second round. I don't see us in the

second round here. I think that's a mistake and we should do something to change it.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Chairman, my impression here is that under (c) they do in fact get questions.... Oh, I see, it's "the opposition and the Liberals". It's the opposition and the government in that case.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: But, Mr. Chair, they get a full slate in the very first round.

The Chair: What I've seen in number (c) is that it's back and forth between opposition, so that would be shared among opposition members. Is that correct? Is that the intent?

In French, it's all the opposition; in English, it is only the official opposition. We'd want to change it to make sure that it was all opposition. Would that be acceptable?

• (0920)

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes, if that's what's intended, it would be acceptable.

The Chair: Ms. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: But it says "and the Liberals", which meant the government at the time. Are you going to put "Conservatives" there?

The Chair: That's correct. Yes, we're switching "Liberals" and "Conservatives" there.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Excellent.

The Chair: All right. Here's the way motion 13 should read now. Everything should remain the same. When we get to the first round, it should be the Liberal Party in number (a), it should be the Conservative Party in number (d), and then in number (c) it should be back and forth between the opposition parties and the Conservatives, at the discretion of the chair.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I think you mean under the second round that (a) would be the Liberal Party and (b) would be the Conservative Party.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Okay.

The Chair: Yes. Thanks for pointing that out.

Mr. Martin, is that okay? Is that acceptable?

Mr. Tony Martin: I'm not sure how the Bloc feels about this, but I feel there should be something to indicate that we would in fact be in the mix on the second round. If the chair decides to go back and forth between the Liberals and the Conservatives, he can do that.

The Chair: Well, I read it this way, and correct me if I'm wrong. It will be Liberal, Conservative, and then it will be one of the opposition. It will be one of the other oppositions, so you would be included in that round.

Hon. Geoff Regan: But what it says and what it means is obviously this side of the room is the opposition, and we would be included in the part after the first round and (a) and (b) of the second round. Obviously, so would they. That's my reading of it. Obviously, the other party should clearly not be excluded from that round.

The Chair: Monsieur Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, in the 38th Parliament, we did in fact give the Chair similar latitude and he pretty much followed the order set out in the first scenario. Shouldn't we keep to this order for the second round of questions? However, questioners would have five minutes, not seven. This way, it's clear to everyone.

[*English*]

The Chair: I believe the second round is five minutes.

The proposal, Mr. Lessard, is that the second round be exactly the same as the first round, with five minutes.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): I would just point out that obviously this is different from what happened last time around. I wasn't here, but it looks like the government got every second one in the second round last time. You'd be changing that if you went this way.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: I think we should have some confidence in the chair and have it remain as it was. We should pass the motion. The question is the discretion of the chair; would he be fair. I'm certain he would be.

The Chair: May I suggest that as a compromise we look at the second round as Liberal, Conservative, and then opposition, Conservative, and then other opposition, so the NDP and then back to the Conservatives. That would be the intent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I fully agree with Mr. Lessard's suggestion. For the first round of questions, party representatives would each have seven minutes and would proceed in the following order: the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Conservative Party. For the second round, according to Mr. Lessard, the same order of questioning would be followed, except that representatives would each have five minutes.

Would Mr. Lessard care to move a motion to that effect?

• (0925)

Mr. Yves Lessard: I so move.

[*English*]

The Chair: I just want to point out that last year, and from what I saw happen in other committees, it went back and forth because of the number of members from the government. It gave all their members a chance to speak.

The real question that I think Mr. Martin is asking for here is to make sure he has a second chance to speak, and that everyone in every one of their respective parties would have a chance to speak. That's where I'm thinking his intent was going.

My thought would be that as it's proposed here, and as it worked under the 38th Parliament, it would be Liberal, Conservative, and then it would be the Bloc, then Conservative, and then it would be the NDP, and then Conservative. That's the way it worked in the last government with the Liberals, in reverse. That would be the suggestion, just to make sure Mr. Martin has an opportunity to get a second chance.

Is that okay? That's really the question Mr. Martin is asking, if he could participate for a second round, even though he may not be entitled to a second question.

Any other points?

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I disagree with that. I believe we should have a first and second series, such as seven minutes and five minutes. We have plenty of questions all the time for witnesses. You should add a third series where you alternate between the opposition and government.

I think it's important that all representatives of the opposition can have a second slot, to make sure everybody has equal time. It's just for the sake of equity.

[*Translation*]

During the first round of questions where members would have seven minutes, we should proceed in the manner suggested. For the second round, each opposition representative would have five minutes. Subsequently, for the third round, questions would alternate between the government and the opposition. This approach would be conducive to the smooth running of the committee. We're capable of weeding through all of the questions. However, all political party representatives, whether from the opposition or from the government, need to have their formal say during the first two rounds of questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: I want to point out again that in the second round, the government will not get a chance to have all their members heard. If we don't go to what was proposed in the 38th Parliament, I am suggesting that if we go to a third round, then we should be able to alternate back and forth.

Go ahead with your comments.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): From my experience, the government doesn't always get all their members anyway. I think the alternating approach was based on a majority government where there were more government members than opposition. I think it's going to be very important that all parties be represented in the second round. Alternating in the second round really isn't a fair picture of the country after this election.

I support Monsieur Lessard.

The Chair: But it was fair in the 38th Parliament?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I wasn't on the committee.

The Chair: This is the same procedure as the 38th Parliament.

Mrs. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Yes, exactly. It does reflect the House better if we do it the way we did it in the previous Parliament.

So the second round is Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, and the third round is Liberal, Conservative, and then Bloc, NDP, if time allows.

That's more in tune with what is reflected in the House. It's not necessarily what was done in the last Parliament but how the House is reflected. Unfortunately, the second round doesn't reflect that if we include the third party of the House.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, welcome to politics.

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I will make a formal amendment.

[*Translation*]

I second my Bloc Québécois colleague's motion calling on us to keep to the same order for both the first and second rounds of questions. The only difference is that seven minutes would be allocated in the first round for questions and five minutes in the second round, with representatives of all political parties present allowed to ask questions. With this amendment, I move that the Chair allow, at its discretion, a third round of questions during which opposition parties and the government would take turns asking questions. I'd like to make this a formal motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coderre. Let me just recap that.

We would look at round one and two exactly the way it is laid out, but in the third round, at the discretion of the chair, we go back and forth between the government and the opposition. Correct?

• (0930)

Hon. Denis Coderre: And series number one is seven minutes and series number two is five minutes.

The Chair: And number three would be five minutes as well.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Alternatively, at your discretion.

The Chair: Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: I'd just like to ask a question, based on the fact that I haven't been through this before. That would leave the member from the NDP having 12 minutes, whereas I would, for example, have just over two. Is that a reasonable approach?

An hon. member: You're not alone.

Mr. Mike Lake: No, I know, but if you look at Parliament the way it's represented right now, does that seem reasonable? Does it

seem reasonable that that party would get the same amount of time as the government party? I don't think so. Clearly it doesn't make any sense.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: I request a vote on the motion. I'm referring to both the proposal and to the amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Coderre has proposed that in the first and second rounds we have the Liberal Party, the Bloc, the NDP, and the Conservatives, at seven minutes each; the second round would follow in exactly the same way, with only five minutes; and the third round would be opposition, government, opposition, government, five minutes, at the discretion of the chair.

That is the proposal we have out there. Is there any more discussion on that proposal?

I'll call the vote then.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I believe we have another motion that should be before you. It's from Mrs. Yelich. I'll just read it out to you:

I, Lynne Yelich, Member of Parliament for Blackstrap, move that the following two motions be added to the Routine Motions of the Standing Committee on Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities:

1. That whenever the Main Estimates or the Supplementary Estimates are tabled in the House, the Committee invite the Minister and any relevant Senior Officials of a Department to appear at a meeting of the Committee, which is televised if possible.
2. That whenever a Chapter of a Report of the Auditor General refers to a subject under the mandate of the Committee, the Committee invite the Office of the Auditor General of Canada and any relevant Senior Officials of a Department to appear at a meeting of the Committee, which is televised if possible.

That's the proposal. Do we have any discussion on that?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Do we have any additional business for today? Good.

The meeting is adjourned.

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