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—
Chair

Mr. Rick Casson

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• (1040)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)): Okay. We're good to go.

Mr. Coderre has brought up the issue that we as a committee passed a motion to invite, I believe, three ministers for three hours. That's what we moved forward, and we invited those three ministers.

However, at the same time as we were passing that motion, the foreign affairs committee passed the original motion. What we've been doing since is trying to weave this all together. As it turns out, I believe there are four ministers coming. What we have today reflects these questions, and the order of precedence, or how the questioning will take place, is a combined effort between the clerk and the chairmen of the two committees.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: So, there will be four of us. Who exactly will be there? Ministers Day, O'Connor, Verner, MacKay or Guergis?

[English]

The Chair: Ministers MacKay, Day, O'Connor, Verner, and Guergis.

An hon. member: So five?

An hon. member: Who's talking?

The Chair: We've indicated that there will be opening remarks from all four for seven minutes.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): So the parliamentary secretary is not speaking.

The Chair: The response we received from that minister indicated that the parliamentary secretary would be accompanying the minister.

Ms. Dawn Black: But not taking seven minutes.

The Chair: That's the way I interpreted it, but I'm hesitant to go there.

At the present time, my understanding is that we get four ministers for seven minutes, which is 28 minutes. That will leave us basically with the first and second rounds of what we usually do: the official opposition for 10 minutes, the Bloc for ten minutes, the New Democratic Party for 10 minutes, and the government for 10 minutes. And then in the second round we go Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Liberal.

Ms. Dawn Black: That's as far as we'll get.

The Chair: That is as far as we'll get.

I know, Mr. Coderre, it doesn't follow the motion that we put forward, but I think with the confusion and complications when the two motions didn't match, how do you accommodate that?

I understand the reason you wanted more time and fewer ministers was to focus the questioning on who you felt was relevant to the situation. I do believe that still can happen. Besides the opening statements, each party can go after whichever minister they wish. In this instance, nobody can say, well, that's somebody else's responsibility and you'll have to get them in front of you, because they will be in front of us. Hopefully that will bring to a head any questions that are asked.

There should be somebody sitting in front of us who can answer them. I believe that's what the focus and reasoning was for setting it up this way. In my mind, it will work.

Anybody else?

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: I have a big problem with that, Mr. Chairman. Tomorrow we are scheduled to talk about inmates. I have no idea why the Minister of International Cooperation is on this list. Already she will be using up seven minutes. I am sorry, but they will have 28 minutes, or a total of one-half hour, to speak on the subject. The Conservative Party will have 35 minutes, the Liberal Party, 30 minutes, the Bloc Québécois, 20 minutes, and the NDP, 15 minutes.

If we really want to get to the bottom...The fact that you are focusing, in my opinion, more on National Defence and Foreign Affairs...I can find enough to say to fill 10 minutes, but so too can my foreign affairs colleague. If we split the time between ourselves, it's going to look like we are trying to sidestep the question.

I must admit that I'm none too pleased with this turn of events. You will recall that we decided the Minister of National Defence should nevertheless testify before the committee, but I fail to see the relevance of having other ministers put in an appearance. I am not sure that we will be able to get to the bottom of things, Mr. Chairman. That's what I think.

[English]

The Chair: I know that's your opinion, Mr. Coderre, and I appreciate that, but I have a different one.

Claude.

•(1045)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: In terms of how the situation has evolved, I do not give much credence to the theory that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development has short-circuited the Standing Committee on National Defence. I think we're seeing a well-orchestrated initiative on the part of the government. Let me explain what I mean by that.

The Minister of National Defence is the one who has dropped the ball two or three times since the very beginning. Tomorrow's scheduled meeting is designed to take him out of the line of fire. In other words, we are going to be diluting our proceedings. Not only are we going to hear from more...

[English]

Ms. Dawn Black: We're not getting any translation.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Not only have we decided to invited more ministers in an attempt to water down these proceedings, but what's more, we are cutting the meeting short. Understandably, I'm none to pleased about that.

Ideally, we wanted to hear from the Minister of National Defence alone. He is the person to whom we would like to direct our questions. I would even venture to say that when we do put a question about the agreement to the Minister of National Defence tomorrow, I would not be surprised if the Minister of Foreign Affairs jumps in to answer. There is nothing to stop me from directing my question to the Minister of National Defence, but what will I do if the Minister of Foreign Affairs interjects to inform me that international treaties are the domain of DFAIT, not DND. I want things to be on the record.

To my mind, it is very clear that the whole purpose of this government exercise is to take the minister out of the line of fire. Nor is this the first time we have seen this happen. We asked questions in the House, but he put off answering them for two or three weeks. Others were left to field our questions. I am concerned that the same thing will happen tomorrow. If it does, then the matter will not have been resolved.

I will probably be asking the committee again to formally agree to having the Minister of National Defence appears on his own before the committee. Then, he will not be able to deflect any questions on the pretext that responsibility for answering them fall to someone else.

I simply wanted you to know that I am not satisfied with the plans for tomorrow and that I am planning to move another motion. As far as I am concerned, the person who is primarily responsible is the person we insisted on talking to, namely the Minister of National Defence. However, I have the feeling that we will not have every opportunity to put questions to him tomorrow.

[English]

The Chair: Before we move on, I would just reiterate that at the last meeting, Claude, a request was made of the clerk and the chairman to write a letter to the Minister of National Defence to

indicate that tomorrow's meeting did not preclude the request for him to come to this meeting, and that has been sent, so that's very clear.

Next we will have Ms. Gallant, Ms. Black, and Mr. Hiebert.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): I just want to comment on Denis's concern over the time allocations.

It's difficult enough for everyone at this table during the defence committee meetings to pose a question to witnesses. Even if it means perhaps decreasing the amount in the first round, could we consider taking the total time available for questioning and dividing it up so that everyone in each committee has a chance to pose at least one question? First of all, we'll have to figure out many people are going to be there, but instead of having 10 minutes for one person, we could just divide it up a little more evenly.

The Chair: We've indicated that there'll be 10 minutes for the official opposition. That will be their time, as it will be the government's. All parties will have to decide how they're going to divide their time. That will be up to them. Instead of trying to structure it that way, if we leave it up to the parties, they can decide who's going to ask what question.

But thank you for that.

Go ahead, Ms. Black.

Ms. Dawn Black: I would like to reiterate that at the last meeting I was the one who had some reluctance about this format. Then a motion was passed through the committee to drop the international cooperation minister. Now we find that not only is that minister coming, but the parliamentary secretary is also at the front of the table. I concur that this will not be an opportunity for all the opposition parties to really ask the questions they have around the issue of the detainee transfer agreement and the history of it.

We did reiterate again that the Minister of National Defence has been requested to come before this committee. He had set a date to be here and then cancelled that appearance. In no way does this meeting with five representatives take the place of his appearance with General Hillier at the Standing Committee on National Defence to answer the questions that all of us have put to them.

I know the letter has gone out after the committee reiterated that request, and I'm wondering if we've had any response yet from the minister's office.

•(1050)

The Chair: Not that I'm aware of.

The indication is that upon the committee's asking what has transpired, the request is in the minister's office. That's the response we've received.

Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This might be an instance of some members thinking the glass is half empty and others thinking the glass is half full.

At the same time as there are concerns expressed about this meeting, I think another perspective could be seen in that the government is clearly working hard to provide an opportunity for all members in all committees to address their concerns. It's no small task to bring four ministers and a secretary of state together at one time to answer questions related to these issues. I think, at the same time, we could clearly indicate that the government is working hard to be responsive to these requests.

With respect to the motion you've brought forward, are you leading us to have somebody move this motion and have a vote on this motion?

The Chair: Yes. I apologize. I should have done that before discussion. But I would need somebody to move it.

Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Move what, exactly?

The Chair: Just move a motion that this be the order of precedence for questioning.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I want to know if the order listed here was agreed upon after negotiating with the parties or was it decided on by the clerk or clerks?

[English]

The Chair: It comes from the clerks of both committees based on the rotation that we have. It basically follows what we do.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Will it also be adopted by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, this document is with the other committee.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Also.

The Chair: Yes.

Is there any further discussion? Mr. Coderre.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: I want to understand the exact procedure involved here. Apparently, we are supporting a motion, and the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development is drafting another motion. Who has precedence? If we are holding a joint meeting, why then is a different motion on the table? It is a question of common decency. I totally agree with Mr. Bachand's contention that once again, the government appears to be orchestrating these proceedings. I have nothing personal against the Minister of International Cooperation, but we are supposed to be discussing detainees, and she is going to blather on for seven minutes about her responsibility for one of the three Ds. However, the D that interests us does not stand for development, but for detainee. It's unfortunate that we are caught in this situation.

[English]

That's the fourth D, now.

I believe, Mr. Chair, that not only is it totally unacceptable, it shows a lack of respect for that committee.

Mr. Claude Bachand: The fifth D is even worse: Denis.

The Chair: Mr. Hiebert.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Could I get an answer? Who has precedence on committees of this nature? If we adopt a motion, I suppose it does not really matter, because the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development is setting the agenda. Mr. Sorenson had promised that he would reduce the amount of time allotted to ministers, but we need more than that.

[English]

The Chair: In this case, I know the clerks worked together to come up with this recommendation. I talked to the chair of the other committee, and we were in agreement. So he's going to be arguing for this at his committee, as I am here. But if they choose to do a different one, who has precedence? I think it then breaks down into some kind of negotiation, as it did with the original motion.

Bringing these two committees together is never an easy thing to do. We're at a point here, Denis, where I honestly cannot answer who would have precedence. I think then it becomes an issue for the chairs and the clerks to work out something together.

● (1055)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: I am trying to understand. We were told that we would only have two hours instead of three because a vote was expected tomorrow evening. As it happens, there will not be a vote tomorrow evening after all. There will be one this evening, as well as a ways and means vote on Thursday. I want everything to be clear, because this portion of the meeting will be conducted in public. If the only reason for cutting into our time was the scheduled vote, well, we know there will be not be one now. I want people to understand that we are losing 67 minutes, the time it will take a minister to deliver a useful speech, as well as another sixty-minute period. We can discuss many things in 60 minutes, especially if this minister, who often trips over his own feet, is forced to address this committee. I am not sure that tomorrow's meeting will be very productive.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We have Mr. Cannis.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I just want to pick up where Denis left off. Certainly when we asked for three, we got two. Fewer ministers is more. He put forward a very good point, Mr. Chairman, for discussion: who takes precedence? We've had joint sessions with the Senate and the House of Commons committees in the past, and they've worked well, only because there were special circumstances.

But I must say to you that I'm not pleased, only because.... I don't want to use the word "set-up"—I don't like that word—but it certainly does not give this committee the opportunity, given the circumstances, given the issues all of us have laboured on and the witnesses who have come before us, to try to explain to Canadians, because we've taken away time and have now added more witnesses.

I would then ask you, Mr. Chairman, as you've done always, to be very vigilant with the time. I would like to say—I'll make this comment with respect to my good friend General Henault, who was here the other day trying to give us so much information—that we know traditionally the chair says to the witness, “You have 10 minutes”, for example, or whatever it is. As you have done so admirably over the past little while, you've cut us right there, maybe, a bit of flexibility, so that 10 minutes could be fully taken advantage of.

But in closing, Mr. Chairman, I tell you that I am not pleased. It looks very nice. I agree with what Russ said. It's a lot of work to get so many ministers in one committee. I don't even think it's happened before, not that I can recall. But given that you made this effort, Mr. Chairman, there should have been more time to really reflect the seriousness of why we wanted these ministers there.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have Mr. Bachand and then Mr. Hiebert.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chairman, do we need a motion to ensure that the Chair of the National Defence Committee presides over tomorrow's meeting?

You could let your committee know that you have a resolution from the Standing Committee on National Defence requesting that your chair tomorrow's meeting. That would be a very important symbolic gesture for me. Therefore, I would like to a motion to that effect.

[English]

The Chair: We have a motion to deal with here—

Ms. Dawn Black: What is the motion we're dealing with now?

The Chair: We'd like to have our chair chair.

Ms. Dawn Black: Then I want to propose an amendment to it.

The Chair: We're running out of time.

Ms. Dawn Black: Can I propose an amendment?

The Chair: You can propose an amendment.

Mr. Hiebert's right, he's next, and then Ms. Black.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair and all members, there's no conspiracy here. Members of your parties on the foreign affairs committee knowingly adopted a motion that put this in place. If your other colleagues are in disagreement with you, perhaps you need to take it up with them. But all parties supported the motion in the foreign affairs committee to have this joint meeting. There was no complaint; there were no concerns. I think it's incumbent upon us to cooperate with the foreign affairs committee to make sure this happens. It would be horrible if it were our committee that put forward some procedural difficulties or blockages to having this happen. I would hate to see it happen, that this whole thing be set aside at the last minute.

In terms of the timing, there is in fact a vote tomorrow night; we've just confirmed it. It's at 5:30 and it is on citizenship and immigration matters.

Let's not go beyond reality here. We're working hard to accommodate your concerns, and I think we have a motion. We have two minutes before this committee is supposed to be completed.

Ms. Dawn Black: And I have a quick amendment.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: I would hope we could pass this quickly.

● (1100)

The Chair: Ms. Black.

Ms. Dawn Black: I would propose an amendment that eliminates the parliamentary secretary and the CIDA minister from making presentations at the meeting, and that we hear from the other ministers. That would give us all more time.

The Chair: Is that addressed in this?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: We could pass a motion asking for the CIDA minister to be there.

Ms. Dawn Black: I'm presenting an amendment that would eliminate those two.

The Chair: She's put that amendment forward. Is there discussion?

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): That prevents them from speaking, not from being there.

Ms. Dawn Black: Yes, it's to prevent their being at the head table and speaking.

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): I understand, Mr. Chair, that the foreign affairs committee is also arguing that the CIDA minister not appear, so I think this motion should be supported, that we should have the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence, period, so we'll have lots of time for both of them.

An hon. member: Public safety is important.

Hon. Joe McGuire: Or whatever, public safety.

The Chair: The amendment that has been proposed by Ms. Black is that Minister Verner and Minister Guergis do not appear.

Ms. Dawn Black: Do not make a presentation.

The Chair: Well, okay.

Ms. Dawn Black: Is there a seconder?

The Chair: It's been seconded.

Is there discussion?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, it's my understanding that at the last meeting of the foreign affairs committee, they passed a motion asking for all these ministers to be present. We know what the record is, they have been requested to appear. If what Mr. McGuire is suggesting is true...there's no evidence of it at this point.

The Chair: Ms. Gallant, and then we're going to have to wrap up.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I'm not sure where the discord over these two people appearing arises from them, or giving their presentations. I certainly hope the intent is not to suppress the good news and the good work that is being done by the PRT people, our soldiers, and our police who are there.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gallant.

The amendment proposed by Ms. Black is that—how do you want to word that, “That we request that they do not...”

Ms. Dawn Black: We hear from the three only—that Minister MacKay, Minister O'Connor, and Minister Day make presentations, only those three.

The Chair: I don't know where that would fit in. Hang on.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Chaplin): I would say that “The ministers of...”, and specify which ministers be given seven minutes to make an opening statement.

The Chair: Ms. Black is making an amendment that defence, foreign affairs, and public safety ministers each be given seven minutes to make an opening statement.

Ms. Dawn Black: Yes, only.

The Chair: Seven minutes?

Ms. Dawn Black: Yes, and three ministers, those three.

The Chair: Okay, we'll accept this and vote on it.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chairman, are you in fact going to chair tomorrow's meeting?

[*English*]

The Chair: All those in favour of the amended motion?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Which is? Are you going to treat my motion after?

The Chair: Separately, yes.

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

The Chair: Mr. Bachand, are you sure you want to do this?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Oh, absolutely. I think we have the best chair on the Hill.

An hon. member: I second that.

The Chair: All those in favour of Mr. Bachand's motion that it be requested I chair the meeting?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Yes, it's unanimous.

The Chair: Hold it. The clerk is telling me this might not be in order.

Mr. John Cannis: We made the suggestion.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: It's funny hearing from the member from the Bloc when he wasn't willing to chair the meeting when he had the opportunity, now he's asking you to chair the meeting.

Mr. Claude Bachand: I gave you my reasons.

The Chair: When a joint meeting takes place such as this, which has been set up for tomorrow, it is actually two meetings in one, where we have the defence people and the defence chair and we have the foreign affairs committee members and the foreign affairs people, so it's a parallel meeting. So your motion will supersede the Standing Orders.

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: So then, if I understand correctly, each of you will have a small gavel.

[*English*]

You will each have a little one?

The Chair: Or we'll share one.

Mr. Claude Bachand: We'll share one, both hands on the button.

The Chair: Yes.

Perhaps you would allow me this. I assure you I will work with the chair of the committee to make sure the meeting is structured in the way we're used to, but there is one thing I must warn members about. I believe if it gets to a point where we have to, we will probably have to revert to the issue where we will refer all questions through the chairs to the ministers.

I avoid that because I think give-and-take directly is good, but if it gets to that point, that's an option the chairs have. But I hope we won't have to do that.

Hon. Denis Coderre: We like your style, but we're not sure about the other one.

The Chair: We can vote, but it's out of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I hope so. That is why I would have liked to have my colleagues back me up on this.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll express that to the chair of the foreign affairs committee. He might want to talk to you personally about it.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Okay. Yes, I know Mr. Sorenson very well.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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