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Thursday, May 4, 2006

—
Chair

Ms. Bibiane Ouellette

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Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Thursday, May 4, 2006

• (0905)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Bibiane Ouellette): Honourable members of the committee,

[Translation]

I see a quorum.

[English]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

[Translation]

I am ready to hear motions for the position of chairman.

Mr. Bonin.

Mr. Raymond Bonin (Nickel Belt, Lib.): I nominate Ms. Marleau.

The Clerk: Are there any other nominations?

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Madame Marleau is duly elected chair of the committee.

[Translation]

We will now move on to the election of the two vice-chairs.

Since she is not chairing the election, the chair can exercise her right to vote for the vice-chairs.

[English]

I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): I'd like to nominate Daryl Kramp.

The Clerk: Are there any other motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Mr. Kramp is duly elected vice-chair of the committee.

[Translation]

I am now prepared to receive motions for the second vice-chair.

Ms. Thibault.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): I nominate Ms. Nash from the New Democratic Party for the position of second vice-chair.

The Clerk: Are there any other nominations?

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Ms. Nash is duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

[Translation]

I would now invite Ms. Marleau to take the chair.

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.)): Thank you for your support. It was a nice, easy election. I've had only one easier than that before. A number of years ago I sat on the foreign affairs committee, and I couldn't make the meeting, and I was elected vice-chair. In that case, it was easier than this one, but thank you.

There are a number of things we can deal with immediately. For instance, we have a number of routine proceedings that we can go through right now to get them out of the way.

If everybody is agreeable, we'll distribute all of the routine motions, and you can look at them, and we can pass them now or we can discuss them. It's totally up to you. *D'accord?* You'll see they deal with the analyst and subcommittees and all the rest of it.

Perhaps we can look at the first motion, to retain the services of the analyst from the Library of Parliament.

• (0910)

Mr. Raymond Bonin: I so move.

The Chair: Thank you.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The analyst is the same one, I believe, we had last time.

[Translation]

We are very pleased to have once more at our disposal the services of our analyst. He did an excellent job last time. Welcome. Perhaps you could introduce yourself.

[English]

Mr. Philippe Le Goff (Committee Researcher): Good morning.

I'm Philippe Le Goff, from the Library of Parliament. I'm with the economic division.

[*Translation*]

I have been with the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates for four years, which means that I have a certain amount of experience. Please don't hesitate to ask me any questions you may have.

With me is my colleague Guy Beaumier.

Mr. Guy Beaumier (Committee Researcher): My name is Guy Beaumier and I have been working on the Hill for 26 years. I sometimes work for the House of Commons and sometimes for the Senate. I have also work for the Committee on Industry, the Senate National Finance Committee, the Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, and for the Finance Committee. It's my first time with this committee, but I think I'm up to the task. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

The next item concerns the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. In the past, we have had a representative of each party. We can sit down and discuss the agenda, the kinds of things that we might want to have.

I think perhaps next Tuesday we'll have a meeting of the committee as a whole to discuss the agenda and future work so that we can get going more quickly. I find that if you have a subcommittee at first, you have to wait for the subcommittee to meet, and you can't meet from now until Tuesday. I'd like us to get going as quickly as possible.

The only question I was asked was from Madame Thibault.

[*Translation*]

She wanted to know whether the whole committee could sit in camera.

I think it is important that we be able to openly discuss the issues we wish to examine. We will not always agree and it is important that we be able to have discussions without being afraid of being caught unawares after we leave a meeting.

Do you agree?

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Do we have to adopt the motion to sit in camera on Tuesday? No?

The Chair: No.

[*English*]

Would you like a subcommittee on agenda and procedure? As you can see, it's composed of the chair, two vice-chairs, and a member of the other opposition party, so everybody is in on it. I don't mind having this. We could have regular meetings. We don't have to have them at the time, but it's completely up to you.

Madame Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: That's a good thing, but the committee could exceptionally decide not to refer to the subcommittee and sit as a whole committee. However, having a subcommittee is a good thing, because once in a while some of us might be given a mandate to address an issue which suddenly comes up. In my view, it would not be reasonable not to have a steering committee.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I was going to say that we might as well put it together, and then you can use it as needed.

The Chair: Okay, that's fine.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I'll move it, if you need it moved.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I'm assuming that a member of the Bloc will be on it too.

The Chair: Yes. There are two Bloc members. It can be either one—or do you want one in particular?

• (0915)

[*Translation*]

Do you want one or both?

Ms. Louise Thibault: One or the other.

The Chair: Fine, that's perfect.

[*English*]

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: 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 three members are present, including one member of the opposition.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: I so move.

The Chair: That can happen. When we have witnesses, it's better to hear them than to send them away and make them come back.

[*Translation*]

Do you agree?

[*English*]

There are no decisions that can be taken when there is no quorum, but we can hear witnesses and the hearings are recorded.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): I have a question. This is my first experience, so I'm looking to you for guidance. What is the rationale when we have a chair who is not part of the governing party and we don't have at least one member of the party in power there as well?

The Chair: He's talking about the reduced quorum. I think this had at least one member of the opposition. You can have three members of the governing party, but you have to have at least one member of the opposition. That's what it's meant to be.

Maybe because in this case it's—

Mr. Harold Albrecht: In the way it reads, it looks like you could.

I'm not afraid of it. Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to make a big deal about it. It only seems that at the point when we have a chair who isn't from the party in government that it would be wise to have at least one member of government at the meeting for the purpose of hearing the evidence.

The Chair: To make sure, yes.

I think this motion was written for a committee without the chair being from the opposition. We should maybe change the wording. Does somebody want to move that?

Mr. Raymond Bonin: I will move that.

The Chair: So “including one member of the governing party”—how's that?

Mr. Raymond Bonin: We should add “and at least one member of the opposition”.

Madam Chair, Mr. Albrecht is correct. We've been doing this for years and nobody noticed, but it's true that we could have had three from the opposition. It's a good point.

It's your first meeting and you're already fixing things.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Or I'm making trouble.

The Chair: To be honest, there haven't been many committees in the past that are chaired by opposition.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I'm sure, Madam Chairman, that it's very unusual as well to have this small a number.

The Chair: We're going to change it. Ray is moving this motion. We're going to change it to say “provided that at least three members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the governing party”.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Great.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On the distribution of documents, the motion is 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: So moved.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: It's extremely important because there are two official languages in Canada. We cannot start to accept documents which have not been submitted in both official languages. Are we all in agreement?

(Motion agreed to.)

[*English*]

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

This may happen when we run overtime. Our slot is from nine to eleven on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. The likelihood of this happening is not very high, but it can happen. Sometimes you switch, or sometimes you go to longer times. You never know. You

also never know what you're going to be studying and the importance, and so on. So I suggest that someone move this.

Mr. Eugene Morawski (Procedural Clerk): We will be in the slot from eleven to one sometimes.

The Chair: In September we'll be in the slot from eleven to one, so it's a good thing to pass that.

An hon. member: So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: What is going to happen in September? Why are we going to be going from eleven to one?

Mr. Eugene Morawski: We will rotate.

The Chair: Okay.

I like nine to eleven.

Mr. Eugene Morawski: That's why they rotate. Everybody likes nine to eleven.

The Chair: The next motion is on time limits for witness statements and questioning.

● (0920)

[*Translation*]

Did you copy the motion we passed previously?

The Clerk: I changed the party names. The rest has stayed the same.

The Chair: It's the same thing.

[*English*]

It reads:

That witnesses be given five (5) to ten (10) minutes to make their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated seven (7) to eight (8) minutes for the first questioner of each party as follows: Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois, Conservative Party, New Democratic Party, Liberal Party and Conservative Party; and that thereafter, five (5) minutes be allocated to each party as follows: Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois, Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Conservative Party.

Mr. Kramp.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): I have one question for the chair.

I'm assuming this is exactly the same as it was before, only with the Liberal Party and Conservative Party changes.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Fine.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Madam Chair, do we all agree that the seven or eight minutes include questions and answers?

The Chair: That's right.

[*English*]

The seven or eight minutes are for the question and the answer. So if you want an answer, ask a short question, because I am going to be very strict.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Can you put it in the motion that it's seven to eight minutes for the first question and answer of each party as follows?

The Chair: Yes, why don't we? Why don't we amend that?

Mr. Raymond Bonin: It's because some of us tend to go on so long.

The Chair: Yes.

Madame St-Hilaire.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): What do you mean by “at the discretion of the chair”?

The Chair: Sometimes, with unanimous consent, it is possible to change the order of things. I think that's the reason why that is there. Based on my understanding, a party is given seven or eight minutes, then it's the next party's turn. However, if there are too many witnesses, we run out of time. It's mostly for that reason. It has nothing to do with the order in which parties speak or the speaking time.

I can assure you that we will hold ourselves to that. We will have a timer to help us out. Do you have one, Madam Clerk?

[*English*]

Does somebody move this?

You'll move it, Mr. Wallace?

Mr. Mike Wallace: Yes.

(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.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): I so move.

(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.

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): I have a question—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Yes, Madam.

Ms. Louise Thibault: I had the opportunity to speak about this issue to the clerk, whom I met this week. I would like to move an amendment to add a few words to the motion, namely “be accompanied by a member of the staff of the member's party”. It has to say clearly that it's not just a staff member from the member's office. Should my own assistant not be with me, I would want another staff member from the Bloc to be with me. It's no different for colleagues from the other parties. I therefore move that we add the words “of the member's party” following the word “staff” in the French version.

The Chair: Mr. Bonin.

• (0925)

[*English*]

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Madam Chair, I will speak against that amendment. We are the members of this committee, and there are times when there are issues that are very difficult and complicated. I don't want a war going on behind us between our party staffers bringing expertise when there is a special event. We are the ones who are accountable for the work we do. I don't want us bringing big guns every time there is a controversial issue. It should be one of the employees in our office who is on a permanent basis.

I've chaired a committee where they were bringing the big guns. We broke a record for the longest clause-by-clause. We broke a record for the longest meeting, 28 hours straight. It wasn't us arguing all the time, it was people feeding stuff to the members. So if you want to go through that, let the big guns come in.

It's the same as negotiations with teachers' federations, if you've ever been a trustee. You have your negotiations locally, and when it gets tough for them, they bring in the big guns from Toronto and Ottawa. I personally don't care to have that at this committee.

The Chair: Let me just remind you that this is when we're in camera. This is more about in camera. Clause-by-clause is open, normally.

Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I have just a question to the mover, I guess, or maybe to the clerk. The reading I have of this clause as it's presented here is that it doesn't have to be a staff member from our office. It could be any staff member we choose. If I wanted to bring a Bloc staff member, then technically I could, based on the way it's worded.

I'm not sure there's a need to make the change. I will not have a clue whether the person you bring with you is from your office or from—

An hon. member: You will eventually.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Yes, I will eventually, I guess.

I'm satisfied with the way it's worded. I don't think the amendment is needed.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Alhabra.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: What if the member himself or herself is unable to make the in camera meeting? Can his or her staff be there?

The Chair: We'd have to change it, because normally, no. It says “accompanied”. It's up to this group. Mind you, your staff would not have any say in what goes on.

Let me tell you something else. If it's an in camera meeting, and if it's an in camera meeting of the subcommittee, that is reported to the full committee. It has to be okayed by the full committee. The subcommittee has the right to make a recommendation but not to have the final say. Anything that's decided by a subcommittee is brought to this committee. Otherwise, we're all here.

I just wanted you to know that.

Yes.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I certainly understand the concern of Mr. Bonin. I tend to have some sympathy for that position.

I also have another concern. The other concern, of course, is making an intelligent decision with the best information. We all have our various qualifications, capacities, and capabilities, but, as well, we depend on a tremendous number of resources occasionally. I wouldn't want to exclude any of us from having the opportunity to be able to have the most capable assistants here to make a decision, particularly when we're potentially going to be dealing with some very complex matters.

I understand your concern, Mr. Bonin. Were this to turn into a backroom circus, I certainly don't want to go there. I also wanted to have the information necessary that's going to assist us to make the best decisions.

With all respect, Madam Thibault, I certainly understand where you're going with this. I would concur that we should have the possibility of bringing in capable assistants, and there is no disrespect to Mr. Bonin. Our actions will dictate whether we are making the right decision on this, and perhaps we could revisit it if we find that we have a problem.

The Chair: Go ahead, please, Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Just for clarification purposes, is it your thought that the way that it reads now would allow us to bring a staff member, even if they weren't from our office?

The Chair: It doesn't specify; it just says a staff member.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: As it now stands.

The Chair: That's the intent, I think.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Okay, then it would just be a staff member.

The Chair: Mr. Bonin, did you move an amendment?

• (0930)

Mr. Raymond Bonin: I'll withdraw it if it's okay.

The Chair: You'll withdraw it? Okay.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: I can live with it.

The Chair: Madame Thibault?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I trust my colleagues. I only have one assistant, and the day when Mr. Dufour will not sit behind Ms. St-Hilaire or myself, I would not want his substitute to be ejected from the meeting. Members have spoken and I trust them. I take for granted that we all understand the motion and that it refers to a staff member from our respective parties.

The Chair: The object of the motion is to ensure that staff has the right to be present at in camera meetings.

Mr. Bonin.

[*English*]

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Madame Chair, just to add to the discussion, I've lived the experience on the aboriginal affairs committee, in which another party brought in someone from outside

and put them on their temporary staff. That's why I bring this up. If it's not going to be a problem, we won't worry about it. If it is, we'll worry later on.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: It's a good point, though.

The Chair: Has someone moved this motion, by the way, as is?

Mr. Mike Wallace: I'll move it, as is.

The Chair: You'll move it as is.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I would like some clarification what our understanding is at this point, because it says "staff"; it doesn't specify.

The Chair: My understanding is that it's a staff member. It does not mean that the member is a staff member necessarily working in your office. It could be from your party office or from the Prime Minister's Office, that kind of thing, or the whip's office. Those kinds of people come in all the time with their whip.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: In camera meeting 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.

Mr. Albrecht: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Notice of motions: that 48 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration; and that the notice of motion be filed with the clerk of the committee and distributed to members in both official languages.

If you want to bring forward a notice of motion, you have to give it to the clerk 48 hours before the meeting, and it has to be in both official languages.

That doesn't prevent you from presenting a motion while you're discussing a particular topic—am I correct?

The Clerk: It can be sent to me.

I can have it translated and I will distribute it 48 hours before to all the members.

The Chair: This is a standard clause.

An hon. member: So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Omar Alhabra: I just have a question for clarification purposes.

For the 48 hours, what if it's not translated? Does it then have to be submitted to you before the 48 hours?

The Chair: She can have it translated. If it's not distributed 48 hours before the meeting, then it won't be considered at the next meeting.

The Clerk: I would have it translated and then send it out. I wouldn't distribute it unless it's translated, and the 48 hours kicks in there. It's not a full 48 hours; it's two sleeps.

The Chair: *Deux dodos.*

Ms. Nash.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): So to get it to you and get it translated, how long before the two sleeps do we need to get it to you?

The Clerk: It doesn't take long; usually they're short, and I can expedite the translation as soon as possible.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: The 48 hours still applies even if we submit it to you in one language.

The Clerk: Yes.

The Chair: Nothing can be distributed without it being in both official languages. Therefore, the 48 hours, or the two sleeps, means distributed in both languages. Then you have two sleeps and you can talk about it.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: May I just clarify?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: It's not 48 hours from when the members distribute it to the clerk. It's 48 hours from when the clerk...not receives it; she distributes it. If it's after 6 o'clock, sometimes it goes out and members are expecting it to be two *dodos*.

The Chair: It will be three *dodos*.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: It might be three *dodos*.

• (0935)

The Chair: It could be more if the committee is not meeting.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Thibault.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Madam Chair, since we are all here, could we possibly discuss future business, unless members all have something else to do? I know that we are meeting on Tuesday, but if we could just take 30 or 45 minutes to begin the discussion and possibly take certain decisions, we would be ahead of the game.

The Chair: I agree. Do you want us to discuss future business in camera?

Ms. Louise Thibault: Yes.

The Chair: It will only take a couple of minutes. Do we need a motion to sit in camera?

[*English*]

The motion is that we move in camera and discuss future business so that we can move more quickly.

Mr. Kramp, do you want to speak before we go in camera?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Yes. I have a potential objection to going in camera on this. In the previous committee work I've done—and I'm not totally familiar with how this committee has operated here—an agenda was first discussed in the steering committee before it was brought forward to the committee of the whole. I'm not suggesting right now that we take—

The Chair: I don't mind. Madame Thibault approached me and said she preferred if we went in camera, but she says now it doesn't matter.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I just think it's important that we have a discussion. If my colleagues don't want to sit in camera, I have no problem with that.

[*English*]

The Chair: If you don't want to go into it, we can have a discussion and have it recorded.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: It's not just a question of having it recorded. I think we should have a steering committee meeting that should discuss the agenda and then bring it back to this meeting.

The Chair: The reason I was not suggesting that immediately is because it delays what we can do in our first meeting. Our first meeting is next Tuesday morning. I would like it if we could at least agree on what we should do next Tuesday morning so we don't waste one slot discussing what we're going to do. To me it just makes sense.

Madame Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I will present a motion so we can move ahead more quickly. I suggest we invite Mr. Morgan before the committee next Tuesday. Since we have all the documents we need, we could move ahead quickly on an issue which is important for all members of every party, and which is a concern to many.

The Chair: Would you like us to invite Mr. Morgan to appear on Tuesday morning?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Would you like the meeting to be televised if we can get the appropriate room?

[*English*]

Okay.

In case Mr. Morgan cannot come on Tuesday morning, is there something else we could start working on?

[*Translation*]

An hon. member: We have another witness.

The Chair: Fine.

Ms. Louise Thibault: I have the pleasure to announce that I have a list of potential witnesses.

The second witness, who will probably be on the Hill next Thursday, is the honourable Michael Fortier, the minister whom we do not have the pleasure of seeing in the House. We could begin by asking him questions about the new initiatives taken by the Department of Public Works and Government Services. However, I don't think we will have time to finish. In fact, I had the opportunity to discuss this with the clerk and her colleagues.

For instance, we could ask him about the review of the real estate portfolio. You may know that previously, there was a move afoot to sell government property. A study had even been done. We want to know what will happen with that. Then, there is the very important issue of shared services. There are potential savings to be had in the area of shared services. It might be a good idea to sound the minister out on that matter. There is also the issue of bundled procurements and, lastly, regional offices. Six regional offices have been created.

There is ample subject matter to be discussed with the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. And if that doesn't work out, I have a third witness for your consideration.

The Chair: We will invite the Minister of Public Works and Government Services who, as you know, is a senator. We'll see whether he can appear before our committee. There shouldn't be a problem.

Ms. Louise Thibault: He assured me that he would be available.

The Chair: Mr. Kramp.

● (0940)

[English]

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I have no hesitation in getting to work, but I also think we have a number of new committees and members, and we have a number of new members of Parliament on this committee.

I think we should bring in a senior staffer to really expand upon the entire focus and the parameters of this committee so that we can make an intelligent decision as to where we should go with the input from everybody. Rather than just rush headlong into a multiple...I think we should have a direction. We should have a focus about where we're going: how, why, where, and what we want to accomplish. And until we have a broad overview, particularly with the inexperienced members on this committee, I think it would be a good suggestion to hold fire on going willy-nilly.

The Chair: Mr. Kramp, we have some responsibilities that are directly ours, and we can certainly explain them to the new members. There is also quite a good book that was distributed to all the members, which explains that this committee is responsible for the Treasury Board, for the PCO, for Public Works—I don't have the list in front of me—and for a number of crown corporations. We are also responsible for the Governor General and the estimates.

We are masters of our own destiny. Now we know that the appointment of Mr. Morgan was referred to this committee, so there's nothing stopping us from doing that immediately.

We also know that we invite ministers. We will invite the President of the Treasury Board, the Minister of Public Works, the head of Canada Post, and the head of the public service, because they are basically under our review; they're not under our direction per se, but we review them.

So I think we should get started, and we should issue some letters. You'll have to understand, sometimes we want certain witnesses to come to us on a certain day but they can't. If that happens, then maybe we'll do a bit of an overview, and we'll have a longer discussion. That will allow us in the meantime to have a steering committee meeting and have a better idea of where we're going. But I would really like us not to waste committee time and to get going, because these things can take time in and of themselves.

Yes, Mr. Kramp.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: That's fine. Though I don't disagree with you, I do believe that by just carrying on, we're circumventing the activities of a steering committee. The purpose of a steering committee is to help set the flow—

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: —and where we want to go, in an organized fashion. So just to start going on now with this person or this person.... With all respect to the needs, I can understand that the appointment of Mr. Morgan has already been officially, or unofficially, referred to this committee, and I can understand where we should go there. But as far as going further down the road, I suggest we go to a steering committee format and come up with a focus.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Thibault.

Ms. Louise Thibault: With all due respect to my colleague, and without wanting to be stubborn, I simply want to point out to him that from now until the House adjourns, we will be having very few meetings in which to accomplish anything. We all know that. We have received an invitation. I had the opportunity to gain some experience, and I was pleased to meet with the clerk and her colleagues to discuss new elements that should be taken into consideration, and to benefit from their expertise. We all received an excellent briefing document. I don't believe that we can have a more detailed document than the one we have here before us. It is simply a matter of taking the time to read it.

Nonetheless, given the fact that we have little time before the House theoretically adjourns — I know that it is possible that we may still be sitting after June 9 — I have two suggestions so that we may start discussing certain matters as of next week.

With respect to developing a strategy at a meeting of the steering committee, my colleague and I would like to suggest that this steering committee hold a meeting immediately. However, the steering committee will have to present its results to the Standing Committee and obtain its approval. That will take us to next Thursday. I do not want to speed things up excessively, but next week, we will be holding our first meeting since January 23rd. I am hoping, as I am sure everyone else does, that our next meeting will be productive. It is with that in mind that I am making my suggestion.

● (0945)

The Chair: I must also inform you that I asked our clerk to prepare a timeline so that we know exactly how many sitting days are left. It is difficult to plan our meetings without having the calendar in hand. We will have it either next Monday or Tuesday.

The Clerk: That depends on what happens at the meeting on future business.

The Chair: If you wish, we can meet on either Monday morning or Monday afternoon to discuss the committee's future business.

[English]

Mr. Kramp, will you be back here Monday? Would Monday afternoon be a good time for you?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Yes, Monday afternoon.

The Chair: Monday afternoon.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I can make sure that I will be here.

[*English*]

The Chair: We can have a steering committee meeting on Monday afternoon, but meanwhile, on Tuesday, we'll go with Mr. Morgan. And we'll send an invitation to the Minister of Public Works, because at some point he will have to appear before us.

Is there anything else?

I have Mr. Wallace next, and Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace: In the normal course of business when we start up these committees, is it not a normal practice that if there is not a particular issue that we're dealing with, especially at the beginning, we invite whoever technically reports to this committee to come and give us a general overview—

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Mike Wallace: —without a specific hot-item issue in front of us?

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Mike Wallace: So can we not just put that on the agenda?

The Chair: At the same time, because we have the estimates before us, we can make it part of the review of the estimates. It's a good way to understand what they're doing as well.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay.

The Chair: That's quite standard practice, yes.

Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Madam Chair, thank you.

I want to acknowledge the fact that we do have a lot of work to do, and I'm certainly not up to speed on all the work. I have taken the time to read this document. For someone who's new, it's rather overwhelming. I recognize as well that we can approach staff on our own to get this kind of training.

On this side alone, we have four new MPs, and I think it would be better use of our staff time if we were to have an orientation session or two where we could begin to get a better grasp on some of this material, with a staff person who we could ask questions of back and forth.

I will do better work if I am better prepared with some training, before we just jump into things and I have no idea where we're going.

The Chair: Monsieur Bonin.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Madam Chair, I agree with those comments, and I understand the good intentions of my colleague.

At the beginning of the meeting, you explained two ways we can prepare meetings. One is the steering committee, and the other one is the committee of the whole. All of a sudden we invented a third way,

on the spot. We can't operate like that; we either have a system or we don't.

It's completely normal to have the first meeting an orientation meeting. A week ago I didn't even know I was on this committee. It doesn't demean the contribution you will make because you're a new MP; it's my first time on this type of committee, so we're all on the same level.

It's the month of May and there's a lot of work to do, but it's the month of May; that's not our fault. And we'll be breaking for the summer. We're going to be working hard and we'll do the best we can, but I don't think we should change the agenda to question an individual, because the calendar will dictate the work that we do. We have to know what we're doing before we start doing it.

The Chair: Well, I agree with you.

Let me make a suggestion. We're going to meet with the subcommittee on agenda on Monday afternoon. The clerk will find us a place to hold that meeting, if we can find a room somewhere; it doesn't have to be big or anything else. From there, on Tuesday morning, we will invite Mr. Morgan because that has been referred to us, and I'm sure it's important that we start right away.

Does the committee believe that we'll need the full two hours with Mr. Morgan, or do you think that one hour will be enough? Do you think we should take just one hour of our two hours? We could either have orientation before Mr. Morgan comes, or afterwards on Tuesday morning.

• (0950)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I'm just curious if there's any possibility that we could defer Mr. Morgan to the following meeting. The only reason I say so is that if I'm going to go through an orientation an hour before he is here, it would give me no time to then go and do any research that would help me with the questioning process.

The Chair: We're not even sure that we can get Mr. Morgan on Tuesday.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I understand that. Could we just defer it and assure everyone on the committee here now that we've got a little bit more notice?

The Chair: Mr. Alhabra.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: I also agree with that.

For me to get the biggest value out of talking to Mr. Morgan, I would need to prepare myself. I need to make sure that I would make the best of his time and the committee's time. I would prefer that we defer it until at least Thursday.

The Chair: We will attempt to have Mr. Morgan come on Thursday then. It's a pity, because I think we could have got going right away, but if that's the will of the committee, we will do that.

We will have an orientation meeting on Tuesday, if that's the wish of the committee.

Ms. Nash.

Ms. Peggy Nash: It's just a suggestion, but if Mr. Morgan is not available on Thursday, which would delay it to yet another meeting, perhaps what we could look at in that case is your suggestion of splitting the first meeting. If he is available on Thursday, let's do the orientation and let's move on to Mr. Morgan this coming Thursday. Should he not be available, and so that we do not delay to yet another week, maybe we could move him to Tuesday and split the time of the orientation. Perhaps we don't need to know everything about the orientation in the first meeting, and if there's another piece, if it takes two hours, we could defer it until Thursday.

The Chair: I agree, but I'm at the mercy of the committee here.

We will have a meeting on the agenda on Monday afternoon, if at all possible. We're going to try to get Mr. Morgan for Thursday. If he cannot attend on Thursday, we'll see about Tuesday. Meanwhile, we'll ask the Library of Parliament and the clerk to prepare an overview so that you're aware of the kinds of powers we have, what we can do, and what we have to do as well, because there are some deadlines—although there's an agreement now that the estimates don't have to be reported until November, which gives us a bit more time. I think having a subcommittee meeting will help. We'll bring that on Tuesday as well.

Mr. Bonin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Madam Chair, if Mr. Morgan comes on Tuesday for one hour, will he come back on Thursday for another hour?

The Chair: We will decide once he has spent an hour with us, next Tuesday. If time runs out, we will invite him back on Thursday.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: If he comes back on Thursday, he will have spent two hours with us. If I were Mr. Morgan, I would come on Tuesday for one hour.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: But what if he can't make it?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'd like to know, though.... If we can get Mr. Morgan on Tuesday.... We know we have to do this, and I'm sure the government is anxious to confirm his appointment. So this is not rocket science: do you want this man in that position? You question him, and you make a recommendation as a committee. If he can come Tuesday, we'll give him two hours on Tuesday, and we'll do the orientation on Thursday. Otherwise, we'll reverse it: we'll hear him on Thursday, and we'll make sure we have two hours with him, if that's the will of the committee. Sometimes two hours is a long time, sometimes it's a very short time.

Mr. Pacetti.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Ms. Marleau, as chair, you're going to have to use some discretion. Through my experience as chair, I think having someone come in for just an hour is not enough time. He's going to make an opening statement of 10 to 15 minutes and you go around once. It's not enough.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: If the scheduling for two hours is not available, you put him on Thursday. You're going to have to use a bit of discretion.

The Chair: Okay. We will.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: It's not a difficult process. It's an interview of somebody who has already been in the media. I think we all know who he is. The questioning is not going to be that crazy, because parliamentarians love to ask questions that last seven to eight minutes, so I don't even think he's going to have to answer questions.

[*Translation*]

In my opinion, we are going around in circles and we are not getting any further ahead.

The Chair: We are further ahead than we were previously.

• (0955)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: All right.

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I just want to assure you there is no partisan intention. I think it's clear that this is a bipartisan concern, that we be prepared when we come in to this.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: So I certainly want to just reinforce that. It certainly isn't a partisan objection; it's simply an objection based on the assurance that we're prepared.

The Chair: Okay. But as I said, I'll make the judgment call, depending on when we can get him here. If we get him here Tuesday, we'll have him Tuesday, and then Thursday we'll do the—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: No.

An hon. member: No, that's not what we're saying.

The Chair: You don't want that? You want to be prepared for—

Mr. Raymond Bonin: We don't want him on Tuesday.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: We're not questioning on Tuesday.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Madam Chair, I was just going to say the same thing. If we can't get him on Thursday, can we get him the next Tuesday?

The Chair: We can try.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Madam Chair, wouldn't it be easier if you just had a motion and then we could vote on it and then move on?

I move that the first meeting of next week on Tuesday will be an orientation meeting, and on the Thursday meeting we will invite Mr. Morgan to appear for the full time.

The Chair: He is moving a motion that we have orientation Tuesday morning, and that we invite Mr. Morgan for two hours Thursday.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Done. Solved.

Is there anything else you want to discuss before we go?

Monsieur Bonin.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Yes, Madam Chair.

You'll notice that the Bloc Québécois is like an echo in the back all the time. They always have an agenda. So I'd like to suggest that on this committee, for a change, when they have something that they want to surprise us with....

If I want something new to happen, I will lobby all parties and say I'd like to do this at the meeting today, here is my intention, and then you judge on your own. But when we throw things just to surprise everybody because the committee is not organized, as they do all the time, I will resist every time, because we never know what's in the back of their minds when they say, I want to see this person, or I want to do that.

So I would suggest that the Bloc Québécois, in the future, lobby us and share with us where they're going. If there's nothing to hide, tell us before we start this meeting so that we can have a little discussion and say maybe we support you, maybe we don't. But throwing it—

The Chair: Mr. Bonin, just for a second.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: You asked me if I had a comment.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: So I will resist every time they have these surprises, because I've been in that chair for many years, and I've had my load of surprises. That's why I resisted today, and I'll resist every time. Nothing prevents them from coming early, talking to us and saying they'd like to see this gentleman next Tuesday. Then we can react and we can have at least a warning that things are coming.

The Chair: Monsieur Bonin, with all due respect, I suggested that because I felt that we had not been sitting for a very long time and I wished to see the committee move forward quickly. So I did mention it to Madame Thibault, and she was in agreement with me. I just wanted to make sure that you knew that, that it was not the Bloc Québécois. It might have been their idea as well, but it was also mine.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: I will apologize to Madame Thibault, but then I will say to you that if you are going to do this kind of stuff, do it with all parties.

The Chair: Well, I did; I suggested it here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. St-Hilaire.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: Madam Chair, with all due respect to my colleagues, particularly to new members, I would like to clarify one point. We apologize for having prepared ourselves for this meeting. If my colleagues from other parties failed to do so, that is their problem. What we are suggesting this morning should not come as a surprise. It is in keeping with what we learned through the news. We keep up with current events and House business. This is not news. If some of my colleagues do not have a complete picture, they can ask questions.

The Chair: Ms. Thibault.

Ms. Louise Thibault: You will understand that I simply do not agree with what my colleague is saying. Think about it, we haven't even had time to work together. During the last Parliament, I found it extraordinary that during 99.9 p. 100 of the time that we sat together on this committee, there was absolutely no show of partisanship. Today, there are people who are making harmful allegations about

the Bloc Québécois, and some are directed at me because I was here last year. Indeed, it is a great pleasure for me to come back again this year. You will understand that I can't have any of this and I am completely against this way of working.

In addition, the number of nomination certificates is included in the documents sent to us by the committee clerk. The issue is whether or not we want Mr. Morgan to appear as a witness. All I did with respect to the potential work we can do here, was make a suggestion. I heard somebody say that we were working behind the scenes, something I find completely unacceptable. I expect my colleague to withdraw his comments in their entirety. He has never seen me work behind the scenes, nor did my colleagues see me work in that way last year. I find it unbelievable that somebody is making totally unjustified accusations prematurely.

• (1000)

The Chair: Mr. Bonin.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Madam Chair, when I spoke, I did not name my colleague. I talked about the Bloc Québécois. Therefore, I do not have to apologize to my colleague. I cannot criticize her because I have never sat on a committee with her. However, I have sat on a committee with her colleague, and that is why I understand the Bloc Québécois' strategy.

The Chair: I sat with Ms. Thibault, and I have always found her to be extremely fair. She carried out her work and was well prepared. Everything was fine and we got along well. Since we are the only two people to have sat on this committee previously, we should perhaps apologize because we were moving too quickly. We have a list of people we want to hear from, and we must begin our work. Apologies are in order if people did not understand clearly. I hope that things will improve as of today.

[*English*]

Is there anything else that anybody wants to bring forward?

Yes, Ms. Nash.

Ms. Peggy Nash: I want to say that I'm a new MP and this is the first time I'm sitting on a parliamentary committee. While I know that often our debates within the House are extremely partisan, and of course we bring that with us here to the committee, I hope we don't get off on the wrong foot. I think we're all here to make a difference and to do good work, and I found the comments earlier by my colleague not very helpful in terms of getting off on that right foot. I think it is important that we all respect each other as individuals, regardless of our party affiliation. I really hope that's the spirit we all bring to this committee.

The Chair: I had the good fortune of sitting on this committee for the last year and a half, and I found that we were able to work well. We worked closely. We put forward whistle-blowing legislation and made some dramatic changes to that legislation. The object was to have the best piece of legislation possible. I believe we did very good work as a committee, and I expect that we will do the same kind of work.

I will end the meeting with this, seeing as there's nothing else on the agenda. We will see all of you Tuesday morning at nine o'clock, and I will meet with the subcommittee on Monday afternoon. The clerk will find a room and a time for us.

Thank you.

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