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Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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Thursday, May 4, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

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Thursday, May 4, 2006

•(1105)

[*English*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Georges Etoka): I see a quorum.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(3), we are going to proceed with the election of the chair of the committee. I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Bell.

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): I nominate Merv Tweed.

The Clerk: Are there any other nominations?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: We are going to proceed now with the election of vice-chairs. I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

Madame Stronach.

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): I'd like to move that Don Bell be elected vice-chair.

The Clerk: Are there any other motions?

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): I nominate Charles Hubbard.

The Clerk: Pursuant to the rules, since we have two nominations we are going to proceed to a secret ballot.

•(1106)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1109)

The Clerk: Ladies and gentlemen, I've counted the ballots and I declare Mr. Bell elected vice-chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: We are going to proceed to the nomination of the second vice-chair.

Mr. Julian.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): I'd like to nominate Mr. Mario Laframboise.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Are there any other nominations?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I now invite Mr. Tweed to take the chair.

•(1110)

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): I think everybody has the document in front of them. We'll go to routine motions, item number 3, "Services of Analysts from the Library of Parliament".

Mr. Don Bell: So moved.

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

The Chair: Item number 4, "Motion establishing a Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure".

Moved by Mr. Fast.

Mr. Hubbard.

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): The committee is structured a good deal differently from the previous transport committee. In establishing that motion, can the chair or someone define what the overall role will be in terms of infrastructure and communities? It certainly broadens the scope of our committee, and sometime soon it might be good to identify what this committee is going to cover.

The Chair: That's a good point, and after we establish the subcommittee, I think that will be where those ideas come from. Obviously we have to be open to everybody's position and the direction in which they want the committee to move over the next short while. Certainly I don't think you'd find any disagreement among us.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): It might be advantageous to deal with infrastructure matters as they arise and even form subcommittees, because of the workload we're going to have in dealing with specific issues. That might be one way to deal with it.

What I'd like to do at this stage is advise the committee that I've talked to the minister. If you would like him to attend a meeting, he would be pleased to do so—schedule permitting, of course. That might be the way to start off our focus, with questions to him and the department.

The Chair: Mr. Hubbard.

Hon. Charles Hubbard: Mr. Parliamentary Secretary, it seems to involve several departments we're involved with today. I'm not sure how that fits in, but we have one parliamentary secretary. Usually when we have more than one department, we would be looking at a broader scope. The parliamentary secretary is saying transport is his issue, but in terms of infrastructure, which is very important to this country and has been a big factor in past Parliaments, I wonder how this committee is to approach it in terms of broadening our scope of discussion.

The Chair: Mr. Scott.

Hon. Andy Scott: Thank you.

Further to that, I think the Minister of State, Infrastructure and Communities previously dealt with Parliament through the environment committee. It would behoove this committee to quickly take up the space. Otherwise, I think there'll be criticism that, respectfully, where this used to be in environment, which carried a certain message, now it's in transport.

The more quickly we get into infrastructure as a subject matter and not allow ourselves to be too caught in the inertia of the fact that the committee was a transport committee for a long time and it's going to be very difficult to suddenly be something other than that. I think it's going to be critically important to make the point that the infrastructure piece of this isn't secondary, but actually this is the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

The Chair: We'll certainly make sure that with the subcommittee that will be constructed, this becomes one of the issues we lay out before the committee at large, recognizing the priorities of all parts of the department.

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Chair, if I can, I just wanted to make mention that in my studies in preparation for this particular committee I found that, quite frankly, most of the infrastructure and transport issues were often duplicated. Often they dealt with the same project with different funds, which meant more bureaucracy. I found a huge tie between infrastructure and transportation, just because of the nature of the deficit we've had for the last 13 years.

I think it's very appropriate that we deal with them as one matter and one group, because we do need to move forward for all of Canada on something that's quite frankly a deficit all over. In my mind, the key is that when we find issues that are so important to all of us, we form a subcommittee to deal with them, either to bring back to the committee or to have specific recommendations. We do have a huge portfolio, but I certainly think it would be much more advantageous to do that rather than trying to piecemeal everything all over the place.

That's just my opinion, and I do think, obviously, we have to have a steering committee direct us as to how we're going to go.

I think the minister's offering himself at such an early date explains how committed he is to this process. I think if we had him here, and maybe had some ideas from committee members as far as what you would like to see approached and dealt with first, then we could get to work immediately. As time goes on, obviously we're going to be able to change our focus.

•(1115)

The Chair: Mr. Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): I concur with Mr. Jean, because in the last Parliament, even though infrastructures were tied to the Environment Committee, the latter never met to discuss the matter.

You're quite right about this. We should call the minister to testify and the committee should look more closely at the infrastructure issue. As you pointed out, Mr. Chairman, the subcommittee should be able to set some study parameters.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I think the point Mr. Scott raises is a very valid one. We have some major safety issues to deal with—air safety, rail safety, and marine safety. I'm concerned that the infrastructure element, just by the sheer weight of work, would be lost.

In the last Parliament we had within human resources a subcommittee that dealt with people with disabilities, because of course there is a wide-ranging group of issues among people with disabilities at the same time as there are larger issues within human resources. One of the ways to accomplish all of that work was to have a subcommittee.

I understand Mr. Jean's point as well, but with respect to the work we have to do—we have an incredible amount of work to do—I think a subcommittee is one effective way of doing that and making sure the work that's done at that subcommittee comes back here. So I think it is a very valuable point that Mr. Scott raises, that we should be looking at the possibility of a subcommittee to make sure that all the work we need to do gets done.

The Chair: Everyone else has had a comment.

Again, I guess what I'm taking from this is that we will establish the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. Are we asking for a second subcommittee to deal with infrastructure, or one committee that will report?

Mr. Scott.

Hon. Andy Scott: That may be the way to do this. I'm not suggesting it. I might support it; I haven't decided. All I was saying is that because this is the transport committee, and the corporate memory is transport-related and there is lots of business to do, I would be fearful that something critically important to the country might not get this.... I mean, just the fact that this is the transport, infrastructure, and communities committee and that we might consider a subcommittee for infrastructure and communities suggests in and of itself something—that somehow that's a secondary piece of this. I'm not suggesting it's more important, but it's equally important.

I would agree with Mr. Jean that perhaps it hasn't been given the kind of attention, even in the past, that it should have been given, but that's behind us now. I just wanted to make sure that the importance of this to communities, for instance, is critical.

There are debates on the question as to what is transport and what is infrastructure, and what is the difference. Those debates need to be discussed here too. I think it's important to the country.

I'm not saying it should be a subcommittee, as long as it gets appropriate attention in the main committee. Either way is fine by me. If it isn't getting appropriate attention in the main committee, perhaps we have to do something else. But I think the fact that we would consider infrastructure and communities as the thing that would automatically go to the subcommittee alerts me a little bit to the fact that people still think this is a transport committee, and that's the other thing.

• (1120)

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

Mr. Brian Jean: Just very quickly, Mr. Chair, I would like to say that I call it more of a fear. I am afraid that's exactly what will take place. From my perspective, we have a regional imbalance across the country right now in transport, infrastructure, communities, etc., and I think the government has shown how important infrastructure is because they've linked it with transport.

I would like to see, on a regional basis, a subcommittee being short, sharp, and to the point, to investigate specific things, whether they happen to be in Quebec with border crossings, or Windsor, or British Columbia with the Pacific gateway. We would form a subcommittee on those bases, on those very important issues that are going to tie the whole country together, and would have the subcommittee meet for a very short period of time, maybe four meetings, depending on the case. And within a one-week or two-week period—and it would have to do double workloads, and I think we're all going to have to do so on this committee—it would come back to the committee regarding particular regional issues or particular general issues they can task on, and deal with them.

I don't see how we can separate transport and infrastructure. I always wondered how that could be done. I don't think it was done effectively in past governments, to be frank.

Hon. Charles Hubbard: Further on that, Mr. Chair, what is the definition of infrastructure? The previous government defined infrastructure, going back to 1993-94, as being our relationship between the provinces and with the municipalities. Now the parliamentary secretary seems to give a different definition. For the record, it might be good for us to have his definition of how he sees our committee.

The heading on our committee is transport. I guess that was issued, but are we talking about transportation infrastructure or is that communities business that also seems to be floating around part of his definition of infrastructure?

Brian, maybe if you could just...

Mr. Brian Jean: The first thing is that I am not in charge of the direction of the committee. The committee is in charge of the direction of the committee, and whatever the committee wants to study is certainly what I will study with them.

There are very few things that are infrastructure alone. Usually transportation is tied into it, and every community is tied in some way on one end or the other. From my perspective, I think infrastructure, transportation, and communities are tied into just about everything we deal with.

Certainly, on the basis of allocation of funds and a general overview on where this country is going.... For instance, in Pacific gateway and borders, right now we have problems in both areas as far as transport of goods goes. I don't see it that way.

The Chair: Mr. Scott, go ahead, please.

Hon. Andy Scott: This isn't mutually exclusive. No one has mentioned water treatment. A large amount of the infrastructure program was environmentally based. There were some cost-sharing agreements with provinces on highways and so on, but a big, big piece of it had to do with water treatment, sewage treatment, building in communities, supporting communities in their local infrastructure needs. If you look at the list of projects that were undertaken in that area, it was more often environmentally based.

I'm not saying that it necessarily means it should be that way. I'm not saying that at all. All I'm saying is that we need to recognize that here so we don't think of infrastructure as simply transportation or transport, which would be the way the committee would emerge, because that's what the committee has been. Windmills are eligible under the infrastructure program. I don't think they're going to get picked up easily in transportation. As long as we're deliberate in wanting to include them, I'm quite satisfied we will.

We'll have to be deliberate because it's not going to come naturally. I think the nature of the discussion so far has demonstrated that we're thinking of this as being transportation, and there's a lot more to infrastructure than that.

The Chair: Mr. Jean, go ahead, please.

Mr. Brian Jean: I think you're right, but when you want to change sewer lines, you usually tear up a road to do it. When you want to put windmills in, you have to look at where geographically there's going to be competitive advantage, where you're going to have delivery of service, where you're going to find the people to do so.

I'm not at all saying this is just transport. What I'm trying to say is I think all of them intermingle among themselves, and they're all going to deal, sooner or later, with transportation, just like transportation is going to deal with communities and infrastructure and water and sewage treatment systems. But I think to put them together and look at them in one package means that we're going to be more efficient, we're going to get better use of the money we invest, and have less bureaucracy, which I think is what we all want to get to, sooner or later.

• (1125)

The Chair: After we have our first subcommittee meeting, taking the conversation we've had, we'll identify the priorities and how they work together. I don't think anybody would be opposed to other people.... Obviously we want to listen to everybody on the committee, to what their interests and concerns are, and try to prioritize it so that we can get some things accomplished. Is that a fair comment?

Okay? Great.

We're back to number 4.

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

The Chair: On item number 5, the motion to receive and publish evidence in the absence of a quorum, we have two choices, (a) or (b). I don't believe I have to read them.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'd like to propose (b) for quorum. Yes.

Given the importance of the issues we'll be discussing, having the higher quorum would be a more effective way of ensuring we're actually getting our work done. All of us, of course, are pledged to attend these meetings and to work as hard as we can on the committee. A higher quorum I think assures that.

The Chair: Comments?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I second Mr. Julian's motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: We are addressing item 5(b).

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

The Chair: Item number six deals with allocation of time for questioning. What we have there is the history of the committee.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'd like to propose that we change the final line to read, "between each party". In other words, we'd have a time allocation of seven minutes for the first questioner of each party, and then five minutes rotating among the parties. This is the same type of format we adopted yesterday in the Standing Committee on International Trade. It allows for more collegiality and allows for more input from each of the parties. I think it's the most effective way to proceed. Other committees are adopting this kind of format. I think it would be effective for our functioning as well.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: With respect, I disagree.

I would like to see many members from different parts of the country. Unfortunately, under that particular system, we will not hear from each and every party member because of time. I would like to see an opportunity for everyone present at the meeting to be able to give an opinion or to ask particular advice to the witnesses. I could see it allocated after that on the basis of parties, but certainly I would like to hear from my friend from Quebec, for instance, on particular issues the witnesses might bring forward, or my friends from the Bloc, or my friends from the NDP, etc.

I found that in the last committee, in environment in particular, which of course you are aware of, there just seemed to be no time for everybody. Everybody was scrambling. I would like to hear from each and every member. They represent 80,000 to 120,000 people, no matter which party they are from, and each and every one of us brings a different perspective. I would like to see something in the range of five minutes for each person, and after have it allocated on the basis of parties. That would be my proposal.

The Chair: Mr. Hubbard.

Hon. Charles Hubbard: I think it's probably more significant to talk in terms of people or persons, as Mr. Jean has said. In terms of around the table, each person should have a chance before another person should have a second opportunity.

The Chair: My experience in two committees in the last session was that it functioned that way. I know each committee is able to determine its own destiny, so I ask for any other comments on this matter.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Under the current structure right here, what is proposed would allow a first round for each party and then a second round that would alternate, so it would be Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, NDP, meaning that each opposition member or each opposition party would be able to speak one time out of six.

The proposed rotation was inadequate. What I proposed—the amendment I suggested—actually allows for more opposition input.

The Chair: Mr. Bell.

Mr. Don Bell: If I understand, Mr. Julian's suggestion would be that the final phrasing would just refer to alternating between parties.

• (1130)

Mr. Peter Julian: Each party.

Mr. Don Bell: Each party.

We ran into this problem of the back and forth last year in this committee. On the opportunity to go around and to deal with the issues in a timely manner, I would agree with Mr. Julian's position. I think it should be amended at the end in terms of between each party.

The Chair: Mr. Scott.

Hon. Andy Scott: I think we're here equally as members of Parliament and I think that once all members of Parliament have had their opportunity to speak, then we can speak in terms of being from political parties and so on. Otherwise, what happens is that those of us who are in numbers of four and five, have one-fifth of our party's opportunities, or one-fourth of our party's opportunities, compared with those of us who are here singly. As long as that's respected, I think that's where we want to go.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I would make a motion at this time, Mr. Chair: that witnesses be given up to ten minutes for their opening statement; that, during the questioning of the witnesses, there be allocated five minutes for each person present; and thereafter, at the discretion of the chair, time be allocated between each party on an equitable basis. That would give each person an opportunity to question the witnesses.

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, now we're getting into a procedural muddle, because we're looking at two amendments on the floor that are contradictory. I did move my amendment first, which is what we would have to vote on.

I think the sense of what Mr. Jean is suggesting is actually that we have a smaller question period at the beginning, which would be a disadvantage for each party, moving from seven to five minutes. It would be a clear disadvantage to each of us to provide the kind of questions that we need to ask on behalf of our parties and our electorate. So I would disagree with the move to reduce the period of questioning; I think that would be a disservice to this committee.

The Chair: Mr. Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I would second the last motion introduced by Mr. Jean. I suggest we vote immediately on Mr. Julian's motion, so that Mr. Jean can table his motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think the amendment that was put forward by Mr. Julian has to be dealt with first. His amendment basically changes the last sentence. It eliminates “between government and opposition parties”, and reads, “between each party”.

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: Now we will move to Mr. Jean's proposal. Just for clarification, he is suggesting that the witnesses be given a ten-minute opening statement and that there be questions of five minutes for each person present on the committee.

Mr. Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: That's not what you were saying.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean: I'd be happy to read out the....

The Chair: Maybe we'll ask Mr. Jean to do that.

Mr. Brian Jean: I'll reread it, Mr. Chair. It reads that witnesses be given up to ten minutes for their opening statement; that, during the questioning of the witnesses, there be allocated five minutes for each person on the committee present; and thereafter, at the discretion of the chair, time be allocated to each party equitably.

So each person present would receive five minutes, Mr. Chair, and then the balance of the time would be allocated between each party, whichever member wanted to do so. It it would be done on an equal basis, so that with four parties and twenty minutes left, they would have five minutes each.

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I think this would do a real disservice to the committee. Looking at how other committees are being structured, this is not how they are doing it. I think it's a disservice to opposition members too. So I would oppose the amendment. I think it's certainly a disservice to Bloc members and to the NDP as well.

• (1135)

The Chair: Mr. Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: When you first spoke, I understood you to say that seven minutes would be allocated to the first questioners of each party, and that the second part of the motion would be changed. Now, you're amending the motion altogether. I can't agree to that.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Each party would be allocated seven minutes, following which everyone would have five minutes.

[*English*]

The Chair: It was originally suggested it be five minutes—I've made the change here—as opposed to seven.

Mr. Brian Jean: The reason I said five instead of seven is because if it were seven minutes the first time around, there wouldn't be enough time in the whole to divide any time afterwards among the parties. I did a calculation on this last time, an analysis—I wish I had brought it today. It ended up that a significant amount of time was given to the NDP member at the last sitting, and many of the people—even Bloc members, and Conservatives for certain—didn't receive an opportunity to ask any relevant questions.

I'm not stuck on five minutes or seven minutes. That does not matter to me. If you want to discuss it, I'm prepared to accept a friendly amendment on that. My point is that each person present at the committee should have the same amount of time to start, so they can ask at least one or two questions to the witnesses. That is, seven minutes, five minutes....

The Chair: Mr. Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I have a problem with that arrangement. It flies in the face of tradition. Each party has a chance to ask questions during the first round. I don't see a problem giving each questioner a turn during the second round, but the first is for each party. It was my understanding that the motion introduced by Mr. Jean was aimed at recognizing each party during the first round, and each questioner during the second round. I wouldn't have a problem with that format.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: If my friend is making a friendly amendment, I would accept a friendly amendment on that basis.

The Chair: So the amendment is basically giving seven minutes, as opposed to five minutes, to each party for the first round of questions.

Mr. Brian Jean: Yes, and after that each member would get five minutes, I suppose.

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: What would be the order of that? Would we have five Conservatives going first, and then four Liberals?

The Chair: You'll find the chair very reasonable.

Mr. Peter Julian: But this is not a small detail. When we have witnesses, normally we're looking at a 30- to 45-minute process. If we're lining this up in a way that other committees have clearly chosen not to take, I think the parliamentary precedent is quite significant, to say the least.

We're setting it up so that we go through each caucus, and it's not clear what the orders are. Then we're setting up a situation where there is no more equality in terms of parties around this table. I can't stress enough that other committees have looked at this question and have decided to continue with the process of ensuring that parties have a voice around the table.

The Chair: Experience has been that in all committees it's been on an alternating basis, but I would take direction from the committee.

Mr. Scott.

Hon. Andy Scott: The reality is that a member of Parliament who happens to be the fifth person to speak on the government side or the official opposition side has every bit as much right to speak as a member of Parliament in this committee who's speaking for the third time—who basically benefits from the fact that there's only one of them.

We're here first and foremost as members of Parliament—this is a parliamentary committee. Once the members of Parliament have all had the opportunity to represent the interests of their constituents, then I think we can fall into the partisan party approach to this.

But in reality, this isn't just about opposition. Very often on the government side, particularly in a majority government, members would sit here all day and never get to speak, and they were elected with the same mandate as everybody else.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I can't express how pleased I am that Mr. Scott would take that position. Quite frankly, Mr. Julian, I'm surprised that as a party that believes in proportional representation, you wouldn't feel that this would be the fairest method for everybody's constituents to be heard.

But there's a motion on the floor, if there's any more discussion.

● (1140)

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: The motion on the floor doesn't have the speaking orders, so Mr. Jean, with respect, would this go through the five Conservative members after the first round of questions? We have no idea. We have no idea what the order would be. For the committee to take a vote on something without having any idea of the order would be a mistake.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I'd be more than happy to hear a friendly amendment from a friend. I will take note that the allocation of time for questioning in the very first motion is not set out, as far as whether it would alternate as well. But I think alternating is the fairest and most practical approach, so I would take a friendly amendment on that, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: For the second round?

Mr. Brian Jean: For all the rounds.

Mr. Peter Julian: Would you agree to Conservative, Liberal, Bloc, NDP members for the second round? That's by party. In the second round for members we go Conservative, Liberal, Bloc, NDP, and then we go to members who have not yet spoken, Conservative, Liberal, Bloc, in that way.

Mr. Brian Jean: The very mention of the issue is that each person here get one opportunity. The first round would be considered one round. So that person would receive seven minutes. The first person would from each party, one person. Then the next subsequent person would be a different person who would speak, and it would go around to that person. Then when that allocation of time was done it would go to the different parties. I would suggest firstly the Bloc, then the NDP. That would be up to the chair. I see it's not been covered before in any allocation of questioning, but I'm more than happy with that proposal.

The Chair: Comments?

Mr. Don Bell: What would the wording then be that would bring this into effect?

The Chair: The first round would be seven minutes with the amendment for the first questioner of each party. The second round would be for five minutes for members of each party who have not already spoken. In the third round, once everyone has had a chance to speak, then we would have whatever remaining time divided by four.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Chair, sorry to interrupt, but I think it would be fair to start with the Bloc, then move to the NDP, and then go to the opposition party and then the government. I think that would be the fairest approach with that final round.

The Chair: Mr. Scott.

Hon. Andy Scott: I think we need to insert the word “alternating” to satisfy Peter's concern that it could go like that. They don't want that, we don't want that. So what happens in the second round is that unfortunately for Mr. Julian he wouldn't participate because he's already spoken. In the last two rounds it would be the government and the official opposition. Then the final round would start with the Bloc, go to the New Democrats, go to the Liberals, and go to the government. Correct?

The Chair: The word “alternating” is in the wording, although we have changed it substantially.

Mr. Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I don't want us to be penalized, but I don't see any problem with allowing each member to ask a question during the second round, and with letting the debate proceed in that manner. I do want some assurances, however, that my colleague will be given the opportunity to speak during the second round. Otherwise, I don't have a problem with this.

[*English*]

The Chair: All in favour?

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

Mr. Peter Julian: This is a horrible precedent.

The Chair: Item number 7, distribution of documents. Are there any questions or comments?

An hon. member: So moved.

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

The Chair: Item number 8, working meals.

An hon. member: So moved.

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

The Chair: Number 9, witnesses' expenses.

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

The Chair: Motion 10, staff at in camera meetings.

Mr. Laframboise.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I'd like some assurances that the reference, in the French version, to "un membre du personnel" also includes party staff persons. Therefore, I'd like to propose the following wording in French: "[...] être accompagné d'un membre du personnel du parti aux séances à huis clos [...]"

[*English*]

The Chair: I think that's the understanding.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: My point is that I would not want this to be restricted to staff in a member's office. The motion should extend to party staff persons as well.

[*English*]

The Chair: Basically, that is one staff person, either yours or the party's.

Mr. Brian Jean: Is that one staff person per party per member?

The Chair: Yes.

I call the question—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: We should avoid a reference to "de son personnel" as this would then mean the staff persons in our offices. That wording could be challenged. In my opinion, the words "du personnel" can refer to party staff persons, staff in members' offices, research analysts and so forth. No one could then prevent either a staff member or a party staff person from accompanying us.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is everybody in agreement with that?

Mr. Bell.

Mr. Don Bell: I just want to clarify. Is the wording that each committee member can be accompanied by one staff person of the member or of the party? You can have one person, and it can be either your staff member from your office or a party member? Okay.

The Chair: Is everybody in agreement with that?

I'll call the question.

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

The Chair: Number 11 is on in camera meeting transcripts.

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

The Chair: Number 12 is on notices of motions.

Mr. Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I'd like the following to be added at the end of the motion: "On receipt of the motion, the Clerk shall place the motion on the agenda of the next committee meeting". This would avoid situations where the clerk receives 48 hours' notice, and advises us that the motion will be debated at a meeting, whereas we're back in our riding or don't have the time to consider the subject-matter of the motion. If the motion were amended thusly, when the clerk receives 48 hours' notice, we would be certain that the motion would appear on the agenda of the next committee meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are there any comments?

Mr. Don Bell: What would the amendment be?

The Chair: I'm just going to ask.

Do you want to read it?

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Mr. Laframboise moves the following:

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 and that it be put on the Agenda of the next meeting of the Committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are there any comments?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Jean has mentioned that the minister would be prepared to make himself available. Do we want to perhaps settle on a couple of days and allow the minister a chance to see where they fit into his schedule, or do we want to just ask him to come at his earliest convenience?"

Mr. Scott.

Hon. Andy Scott: I think it should be at his earliest convenience, but I don't think that would necessarily be the first thing we do.

I would suggest that we should all have an opportunity, perhaps, to discuss the work of the committee and what we would like to see the committee do. That probably would give the minister an opportunity to organize his ability to be here. I'd like that to be an opportunity so we can then give the steering committee a bit of a sense of direction when they do the work plan, based on our participation. We should be doing that as soon as possible.

• (1150)

The Chair: Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Chair, might I ask the purpose of the minister's visit? Is it a fishing expedition, or will he be addressing a specific topic?

The Chair: In previous committees, quite often the minister was requested basically to give his thoughts on his department and the direction in which he may go. Obviously, members would have questions they would want to ask, and I would hope that if he couldn't answer them, he would be prepared to report back. It is just to understand the minister's position.

Hon. Andy Scott: This is probably best put when Mr. Jean is listening.

At our next meeting, if we could have that brainstorming exercise and know at that time when the minister would be available, we could then decide whether we think it's soon enough, and we'd have that discussion then.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I think it's a great idea. I can actually find dates when the minister is available.

Of course, we also have to deal with the issue of estimates. We should probably do that at the very first meeting, along with the brainstorming, to send them the message of where we're going and what we're going to do, as well as to get the ability to do so.

The Chair: Mr. Bell.

Mr. Don Bell: I have a point. The Prime Minister of Australia is going to be here the day of our meeting, and I think the morning will be compressed. I don't know what it's going to do to the time available for our meeting. You may want to keep that in mind.

The Chair: Okay. Is that May 19?

Mr. Don Bell: It's May 18, I think.

The Chair: Thank you.

There are two other things. Does the subcommittee want to have a meeting at some point in the near future to prepare, and if so, when and where? If it works for people, I would be prepared to host it in my office. We can set aside an hour or whatever time we need.

Mr. Scott.

Hon. Andy Scott: The only point I would make is that I would ask the subcommittee to wait and let's have one round hearing from everybody, before they start making work plan decisions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I was only going to suggest that it may be appropriate for people to work on their own between now and the first meeting to get ideas of where they think we should concentrate. We can come back with at least some ideas of maybe 30 or 40 priorities, and we can then slash them down to 10 or whatever the committee thinks is reasonable. But we should work on it on our own first, so we don't have to waste committee time.

The Chair: Then I would ask that the next meeting be called for next Tuesday. Put your thinking caps on over the next few days and come forward with some direction for the committee.

The meeting is adjourned.

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