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Tuesday, February 3, 2009

—
Chair

Mr. Larry Miller

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• (1110)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum. We can now proceed to the election of the chair. I'm ready to receive motions to that effect.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Before we do, Madam Clerk, we usually have a record of the motions that are being put forward. Do we not have that record today?

The Clerk: This is just for election of a chair.

Hon. Wayne Easter: There usually is tabled with the committee the various positions, the kinds of motions that have been traditionally coming forward. Do we not have that today? It's usually on our desks when we arrive at committee.

The Clerk: This is just for election of a chair right now.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I know that, but for the election of chair and vice-chair, everything else is usually here as a guideline for members, without the people's names, of course. So we don't have that today? That's always been our procedure in the past.

Okay, fine.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): On a point of order, do you have a copy of the routine proceedings, Wayne? You don't have a copy of that either?

Hon. Wayne Easter: You Conservatives have never held anything from us. We have that, yes.

That's fine, Madam Clerk.

The Clerk: I'm ready to receive motions.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): I would like to nominate Larry Miller as chair.

The Clerk: It's been moved by Mr. Lemieux that Mr. Miller be elected as chair of the committee.

Are there further motions?

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

(Motion agreed to)

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

Before inviting Mr. Miller to take the chair, if the committee wishes, we will now proceed to the election of vice-chairs.

[Translation]

I'm now prepared to receive motions for the position of first vice-chair.

[English]

Mr. Brian Storseth: I nominate Mr. Mark Eyking.

The Clerk: It is moved by Mr. Storseth that Mr. Eyking be elected as first vice-chair of the committee.

[Translation]

Are there further motions?

[English]

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Eyking duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

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

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): I nominate Mr. André Bellavance.

The Clerk: It is moved by Ms. Bonsant that Mr. Bellavance be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

[English]

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

(Motion agreed to)

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

I now invite Mr. Miller to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Thank you very much for your support on that. I hope I live up to your expectations.

I want to make a couple of opening remarks. First of all, I congratulate Mark and André on being vice-chairs. I'm very much looking forward to working with you two, and indeed everyone on the committee.

We have a lot of business before us. We're all here. I think in my four and a half years on this committee I've found that although some of the members have changed from time to time, overall we've always had a goal of working towards the betterment of agriculture, and I don't see that changing. At least I certainly hope it doesn't.

You're going to find that as chair I'm going to attempt to do my best to be very non-partisan and fair. When it comes to witnesses, whatever comes out of the routine proceedings as far as timelines go—seven and five, for example—I am going to be very strict that the seven or the five, for whoever has that time, includes the questions and answers. At the end of the meeting, if there's still time for further questions, we can always do that.

I've noticed sometimes in this committee, and in various other committees that I've subbed in on, that the questioning will go right up, say, to the seven and five, and the answer sometimes can take two, three, or four minutes, and I don't think that's fair. I think we'll save that time for the end. So I hope there's no objection to that, and I will treat all witnesses the same way.

With no further ado on that, we have to move into adoption of routine motions.

Now, I have a copy here, a proposal, that I did give to the clerk. However—and this is for André and France maybe—it is not translated, and I apologize for not having done that. But I understand that it has been presented there for review.

So to move on then, has everybody got their copy of it?

Oh, they haven't. Okay.

There are two different copies here of routine motions. One has been translated and one hasn't.

Go ahead, André.

• (1115)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Larry, we are not getting off to a very good start. I am looking at the routine motions, and if I understand correctly, these proposals come from you. Normally, we do not allow any document to be tabled if it is only in one language. This is the first meeting of the committee, and I would be ill-advised to agree to deal with the document that has just been distributed. In my view, it should not be distributed since there is no French version. It should be drafted in both official languages. I suggest that these proposals be distributed at the committee's next meeting. If we have motions to adopt, we can do them today, but not those ones. This will unfortunately delay our work. I don't want the committee to spend the entire meeting settling this matter, but this is not in French and I cannot work with it.

[English]

The Chair: Again, André, I apologize for that. However, there is a copy of routine motions that you do have that can be discussed. With the permission of the committee, I would suggest that we go through those, and if there are any changes in there—some of them are very minor, and in fact most of them are very minor. We probably wouldn't have to come back at another meeting; I think we can do it.

Members can speak to their amendments or changes, or even additions, and we can go from there.

Would that be all right, André? We'll work on each individual motion and see where we go from there, rather than just tabling the whole thing. Is that suitable to everyone?

• (1120)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: The document is in English only. I don't see how we can discuss it. We cannot deal with it.

There is no problem for the other one.

[English]

The Chair: André, that's the one I'm talking about. We'd table that, and if anyone had any further amendments or changes or additions to it, that would be dealt with verbally.

I guess you would have to use this one. I think we can proceed on the one that has been translated in both languages. Is that okay?

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Yes.

[English]

The Chair: Everybody has a copy in front of them. The first one is on services of analysts. It's pretty routine.

Wayne.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Do you need a motion to that effect, Mr. Chair? I can make that. But on this issue of the analysts from the Library of Parliament, I'm led to believe that some of our more senior analysts are not going to be working for the committee. It will be more junior analysts who will be here. Can you find out if that is the case? If it is, I want to know why, because in terms of analysts at this committee in particular, in terms of agriculture, corporate memory is extremely important. We've always had good reports, good documentation from J-D.

I don't know if that's the case or not, but that's what I've been led to believe.

The Chair: J-D is here, but my understanding is, and I think you all know, that in whatever department it is, from time to time there are promotions or advancements, and that's what this is.

J-D is here, and if it's the committee's wish, he could speak to that. I know he's still overseeing—if that's the proper word—this committee as one of his duties.

Do you want J-D to address that issue?

Hon. Wayne Easter: I don't want to put J-D on the spot, but I want to know what is happening within our research bureau at the Library of Parliament in regard to senior people who we call on for advice.

Is J-D going to be here every meeting?

The Chair: I don't believe so.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Then I think we have a problem.

In any event, things happen around here in this town. They're not always for the better. I think we need some answers from some of these managers who make decisions, wherever they hide in these buildings. They need to answer to us as parliamentarians.

In terms of the analysts from the Library of Parliament, what I need to know is, what is the new plan? Where are our senior analysts going? What I want to see at the end of the day is the best services available to members of Parliament in terms of research, and I'm not happy if others up the line are making decisions without talking to members of Parliament who use those services first.

The Chair: Before I bring Mr. Lemieux on next, my only comment to that is that nothing is forever. There's no doubt about it, J-D did a great job here. But nobody stays on the Hill here forever; there's that advancement.

Anyway, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I was just going to say, Chair, that Mr. Easter raises a good point. This is just a routine motion, though; I think we can vote on the motion.

The analyst can take a seat at the table, and one of the things we can ask the analyst to do is just to put together a little presentation for the committee on what the Library of Parliament's plan is for the committee.

But we have to pass the routine motion first for him to take a seat at the table, and then we can task him at the end of this meeting to simply propose to us what the Library of Parliament is thinking in terms of analyst support for this committee.

• (1125)

The Chair: Mr. Easter, would that satisfy you?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

I'd entertain a motion then if there's no further discussion.

Hon. Wayne Easter: So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Now we move to the motion on the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

André, this is one that was not translated.

There would be a slight change in this one, and, Wayne, I believe you and I discussed this in the House briefly.

What this one would do is to allow a member on the subcommittee from all parties—and I, as chair, would be there to chair these subcommittee meetings—and that's it. The opposition parties would still have the majority, obviously, in any votes.

This would be the slight change. It would just include me, the two vice-chairs, and a member of the other opposition party, which would be Alex. The proposed change would be to have somebody from every party.

Hon. Wayne Easter: How is that worded?

Are you saying—

The Chair: Well, it would read that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be established and be composed of the chair, a member from the government, and a member from each of the opposition parties.

André.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: We have already had this type of discussion. Ever since I have been a member of the Agriculture committee, we have always operated with a chair, who represents the party in power, two vice-chairs, and another member of the committee. Bear in mind that the steering committee has always picked up ideas that were discussed in the main committee. So all members had already had a chance to discuss what was decided at the steering committee.

So unless you can confirm or prove the opposite, I would say that this option has always worked very well. I don't know if, as chairman, you want to limit yourself to chairing, without speaking on behalf of the government. In the case of both Gerry and James, we fully understood that they were both chairmen of the committee and Conservatives and they discussed issues with us in that capacity. It has always worked very well. So I don't see the pertinence of changing the makeup of the steering committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: To your point as to whether I would basically be acting as just the chair, that's exactly what it would be. That's what I think my role would be, to concentrate on being chair, and not on bringing forth the government's position.

If that helps clarify it for you....

Alex.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Before I start, I'd like to introduce my colleague, Malcolm Allen, who will sometimes be here with me. He has taken the CFIA file and he may be here when I'm not here, so I'd just like to welcome Malcolm here.

I've only had experience with the way we've done it since I've been here, which is having one person from each party. I've found that our committees, the subcommittees, worked really well. They are fairly informal: four people sit around and we get an agenda together. It gives the chair a chance to talk. In the new format, the chair would be limited. I don't think you have to chair a meeting of three or four people.

We seem to have worked really well. I would suggest that we continue that way until we see if there's something that doesn't work. It's worked in the past, and I think we've done a good job. We can continue to do that without getting too involved in changing the process.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, we have a new chair and he has made his preference known. He would prefer to be non-partisan, even though I don't always like that, but if he is going to be non-partisan, I think he has to be consistent all the way through. I think it does benefit the opposition somewhat having the one member of this committee who actually represents the executive branch and the government at these meetings. I think it enhances our position. I believe a member of the executive branch should be there, and I do believe there are times when you guys would like to know the minister's position or the overall direction. Maybe Larry as chair either shouldn't or doesn't have the same insight as the parliamentary secretary would.

At the justice committee, we just had these discussions and the opposition actually encouraged having the parliamentary secretary there rather than some of the other government members. So while it is a change from what we've done in the past, I think this could enhance the way this committee runs. That's all.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to share with the committee that during the last Parliament, I was the chair of the special committee on the Canadian mission to Afghanistan. As a committee, we struck a subcommittee, and we did have a government member on the subcommittee. It made a tremendous difference for me as chair because I was able to remain non-partisan both at the committee meetings and at the subcommittee meetings. My role was simply to manage the meetings, not to table any kinds of suggestions from the government, not to give favour to the government side. I was neutral in all settings, in all manners, in my capacity as chair, and I had the liberty to be so because there was another government representative at the subcommittee meetings.

My concern is that if the chair has to take the government position at the subcommittee meetings, then he is acting in two different capacities for the committee, and I don't see a need to put the chair in that position. If we have a government member—now, it could be me, but it doesn't have to be me. If that's a stumbling block—"oh, we don't want the parliamentary secretary"—I'm fine with that, as long as there is a government member from the Conservative side. It should be no threat to you because you easily outvote the one single member we have there. It will be three votes to one if there is a disagreement on how to move forward.

So it's simply allowing the chair to act in a neutral capacity in all of his faculties, in all types of meetings, and it allows the government, or the Conservative side, to have its own voice without compromising the neutrality of the chair. So I actually think it's a very reasonable proposal. I don't think anybody should feel threatened by it. It's simply protecting the integrity of the chair and allowing us to have a voice in the subcommittee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any further discussion? We need a motion to deal with this.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I assume we're dealing with the translated copy. The best way to proceed, Mr. Chair, is if there's an amendment

to that and we can go from there, just state our position that we think the previous system worked well.

I don't know about other committees, Pierre, but we found that on this committee, at the subcommittee, it really worked well. It's just a chat among four members to set the agenda. That agenda is brought back to this committee in any event and adopted here or changed here. We didn't see a problem with it, but the best way to proceed is by way of an amendment.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: So I'll put forward an amendment to the motion. My amendment would say that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be composed of the chair, a member from the government, and a member from each of the opposition parties.

The Chair: Is there discussion on the amendment?

Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): I think it's always when you move ahead for some change. When I look at it, I've been on committees where they've had a proposed amendment go forward. If you have the chair as neutral so that the chair is not put in a position at some time of having to be partisan at one subcommittee and then coming back to the committee and sitting as a neutral person.... I think it's always better to have that person as a chair, to be the chair, and then have the parties, including the government, represented by a member of the committee.

So I think it's actually good for the committee in terms of not only how it will work, but for the perception of how it should work to the general public and to those who listen, of how a committee should be struck.

I would be supporting the amendment. I think it gives the chair the opportunity to be neutral as chair at both the subcommittee and the legislative committees.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

While I agree with Mr. Easter that this committee has worked well in the past, a lot of this committee's ability to work well, the cordiality and the ability to set partisanship aside....

Clearly, we should have had translation so Mr. Bellavance could have seen this ahead of time; we could have had some discussion on this ahead of time. Quite frankly, I don't think this is an unreasonable request, to ask the opposition to show a little good faith and work together. All we're asking is to have a government member other than the chair sitting there, to be able to fight for what we would like to see at the committee. I do believe it puts the chair in a bad position if he is the one fighting for what we would like to see done in committee. It puts him in a tough spot when he takes the chair during the committee.

What we are asking is very reasonable. We're asking for a little leeway from you. Hopefully we can work together on this.

The Chair: Is there further discussion on the amendment?

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: That is not a good argument. I have rarely seen highly partisan discussions at the subcommittee. We have all of the agricultural issues before us and we virtually always agree on which ones should be given priority.

If I or someone else who sat on the subcommittee, like Mr. Bezan or Mr. Ritz before him, could list a single time when overly partisan arguments interfered with or blocked the subcommittee, perhaps we could revisit the way we do things. On the contrary, it has always worked well.

Moreover, our new chair, Larry, has been sitting on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food for a very long time. So it is not a problem for him at all. He won't be surprised by the issues to be discussed. After that, we will come back to the main committee, we will outline the discussions held in the subcommittee, and we will discuss it all again. At that point, if the parliamentary secretary, the government members or any member of the committee want to add their two cents' worth, we will discuss it.

I have never encountered any problems. So I do not see why we should change the way we work.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bellavance.

If there is no further discussion, we'll call for a vote on the amendment.

(Amendment negatived)

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Reduced quorum has been moved by Mr. Easter.

Is there discussion?

Mr. Brian Storseth: Could I have a couple of seconds here, Mr. Chair, because we're working from two separate copies.

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I have a question, Mr. Chairman.

The document distributed this morning talks about a reduced quorum of three. I thought that the reduced quorum for the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food was five. Have I got that wrong? That has never happened here.

[*English*]

The Chair: I stand to be corrected. I thought it was four, but I will stand to be corrected. The clerk is saying that this is what is presented, but we can come up with any number. You thought it was five. I thought it was four, but I can't swear to that.

Wayne.

• (1140)

Hon. Wayne Easter: I'm not sure either, Chair, but this is just to receive evidence, which is the key point here. We've had committee meetings for which witnesses had spent a lot of time preparing

documentation, and then we lost our regular quorum. This allows them to present that evidence on the record.

I'm not sure what the number was previously. It might even have been five.

The Chair: The clerk is saying it was five, so you're okay.

Hon. Wayne Easter: It was five.

The Chair: One thing Mr. Bellavance said that I would just throw out. For example, I'm not aware of it ever happening in the agriculture committee, certainly not in recent years, but apparently it has happened from time to time in other committees when they were travelling, gathering evidence—I could compare it to our APF tour that was done two years ago, and I think you were part of that. Apparently sometimes either members were late showing up or were unavailable for whatever reason. This is a reduced quorum, but you would allow for any evidence. The committee could still sit with a reduced amount and receive information or presentations, but not have a vote. That's my understanding of it.

Is there any further discussion?

Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Chair, just so we're clear, there's an amendment to change it—on here it's three—to reflect four, recognizing one from each of the parties. Is that...?

Hon. Wayne Easter: That's no problem for me.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Okay, I just wanted to be clear.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Now—

Mr. Bev Shipley: I wanted to be sure that was—

Hon. Wayne Easter: What the motion—

Mr. Bev Shipley: And when you as the chair get started, or if it is for evidence, is there a timeline to wait for a witness or for a member to show up, and if they aren't at a particular time, it can start then?

The Chair: No, I think—

Mr. Bev Shipley: If you don't have a full quorum, they can still give the evidence but there can't be a vote.

The Chair: Exactly, and that could happen at one of these meetings as well as at a regular committee meeting. I think the chance of it happening at a regular meeting are certainly a lot slimmer, but on the road I could see it.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Then just for clarification, Mr. Chair, that number gets chairs to recognize one representative from each party.

The Chair: First of all, we'd need an amendment to that before we....

Hon. Wayne Easter: If I could clarify, one member of the opposition is what we're saying. It could be any one of the parties, but in order to have that reduced quorum, there has to be one member of the opposition there—not one member from each party, just one member of the opposition. There could be two.

The Chair: Okay. What direction do you want to go in here?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: May I ask a question, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: When it says three members, is the chair a member or is he just the chair? Are we talking about the chair, and then out of the 11 of us there are a minimum of three of us, or are we talking about the chair as one, and of the 11 of us there are two?

Hon. Wayne Easter: The chair is one.

The Chair: I would think the chair would be one, yes.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Okay. I'll add my name to the speaking list. I've asked my question. Am I the next guy?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Bellavance already spoke.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I'd like to highlight that there are 12 of us on this committee. There's a problem with the committee if we're down to three, so I think that number is a bit low. I understand that witnesses may have travelled and that witnesses have prepared, but I also think the committee itself must be represented at the meeting. If we're down to three members and one of them is the chair, that's a sad situation. I don't think that represents the committee, so I'd like to see that number go up.

Quorum would be six of us, I would imagine, a minimum of six, and we're talking about halving that. I think that's a bit much, so I would make an amendment that we raise it to four. It just gives better representation of the committee in those circumstances in which we're not able to have a quorum.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Eyking.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): I can't see a problem with having the chair and one from each party. You have four, but you'd need four, right? If you're talking about going from four to, technically, five....

• (1145)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: No, I'm talking about going from....

I'm sorry, Chair. I'll wait till you recognize whoever you want to recognize.

The Chair: My understanding of what Mr. Lemieux said—and he can correct me—is he's suggesting that it be changed from three to four. If we want to discuss it, I would suggest that we should have an amendment.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I did put forward an amendment.

The Chair: Okay. Would you read that amendment again, and then we'll go from there?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes. The amendment is 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 four members are present, including one member of the opposition. The amendment is changing “three” to “four”.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It's a better representation of the committee.

The Chair: Okay, you've heard the amendment. I have Mr. Eyking first.

Do you have anything further to add?

Mr. Brian Storseth: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary would accept a friendly amendment: instead of “one member from the opposition”, “one member from each of the opposition parties”...“including one member from each recognized party of the opposition”.

If you'd accept that, I can explain, through debate on that amendment, why I think that's important.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux, will you accept that?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I think Mr. Easter already commented on that. It might be overly restrictive in that then every party has to be represented, and if only one party isn't there, that's it. I think what we're trying to do is put together a solution where we can have reduced quorum. So I actually agree with Mr. Easter that as long as there's a member from the opposition, it doesn't have to be from each party. That can become a stumbling block for the committee, and what we're trying to do is put in place a mechanism. I just want to make sure that the committee is well represented if we are in a reduced quorum situation, and my feeling was that three was too low.

Mr. Brian Storseth: But if I may, Mr. Chair, in that analysis you may have the vice-chair chairing a meeting and the two other Liberal members as the only members of the committee and it is quorum. You're having the potential to eliminate the other opposition parties, and I don't think that addresses the constitution of the committee. It's not for me to defend the NDP or the Bloc here, but I think it's important that it's enshrined in there that they would have to be here; at least one representative from them would have to be here, to be a reduced quorum.

I understand the Liberal ranks have been shrinking, but there's still three of them, so they could still have a reduced quorum in this under that motion.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Bellevance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: If we limit ourselves by saying we must have a member of each party, we risk encountering the following problem. The quorum is reduced, someone decides not to discuss a certain issue, and does not show up. As a result, the committee cannot sit.

I think we have a responsibility here. Earlier on, someone mentioned that witnesses come from far away. There are not many of us on this committee, but we have to have a quorum. We need to have some flexibility and not require members from all parties to be present. A member from one party could decide not to show up, and we will not be able to sit.

That is why it is loosely worded. We had in fact decided it would be five members, but Mr. Lemieux has proposed four. I don't see a big difference between four and five members, but with four committee members present, including a member of the opposition, I think we could respect witnesses who come here and continue to do our work.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bellevance.

Mr. Atamanenko.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I would not want to come to a meeting and find out it is not taking place. There has to be a member from each party. André could decide not to come because his issue does not concern Quebec. In that case, there wouldn't be a meeting.

I agree, and I'm going to support André's comments, contrary to what Brian believes. That way, we will be sure to have our meetings.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think that's the goal here, to make it so that there aren't any disruptions.

Mr. Shipley, and then Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Well, no, I was just following up in terms of the representation in the protection that comes later on. And again, if we go back, if I understand the amendment to that, there's a time limit and, then, actually, the only change is that you would still be able to hear the witness, but that there wouldn't be a vote if there wasn't the reduced quorum at the meeting.

So I think if we were to move those numbers to four, that would be the preferred amendment to have. You'd never want to take away the opportunity for the people who come as witnesses to be witnesses, but it may have to get deferred, in terms of a vote.

I haven't been on this committee, but I've subbed in, and I don't remember when people didn't show up. I think this committee has been responsible, in terms of agriculture, as the chair said. We obviously don't always agree on everything, but that isn't the purpose of being on the committee. The purpose is to work out the best solutions for agriculture.

So I would just want to make sure we have that clear understanding, and I would move that amendment.

• (1150)

The Chair: Before I proceed, which amendment are you proposing? Mr. Lemieux has already moved an amendment—

Mr. Bev Shipley: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: So that's what we're discussing.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just to clarify for the opposition, this has nothing to do with the government. We're simply talking about opposition parties needing to be represented in order to have a reduced quorum. If the government's here, we have quorum anyway, and if Mr. Atamanenko and Mr. Bellavance don't want it in their party's rights.... I would find

it disturbing if the NDP didn't want to show up to a meeting and therefore used their power to not have reduced quorum by not showing up at a meeting.

I'm simply saying with my proposed amendment that the Liberal Party, for example, couldn't just hold their own meeting and call it a reduced quorum. That's the point. But if that's not of concern to the opposition, then we can move on with it as it is. I know Mr. Easter speaks for the other side lots of time anyway.

The Chair: I want to clarify something as chair, Mr. Storseth. Mr. Storseth you insinuated that you almost—

Mr. Brian Storseth: I proposed a friendly amendment. If it's not acceptable, then that's fine.

The Chair: Okay. If it's not accepted as a friendly amendment, are you proposing it otherwise?

Mr. Brian Storseth: No, that's fine.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I just want to check my understanding of Mr. Lemieux's amendment with Brian. The motion remains as it stands, except that instead of three members—and I agree with him that two members plus the chair must look like a strange quorum for the witnesses—he wants one of the three members to be a member of the opposition. So we are not adversely affected at all. To have a quorum, one member of the opposition must be present and there must be four members in total, rather than three.

Mr. Lemieux, is that the nature of your amendment, to go from three to four members?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, I am moving that the reduced quorum go from three to four members.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Let me just ask a question, Chair. Is it possible in that scenario that a meeting could happen without our being there?

An hon. member: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That makes me uncomfortable.

Hon. Mark Eyking: If you didn't show up—

The Chair: But it would be only to receive information.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It would be only to receive information. It would not be to pass motions or to vote.

The Chair: That's as far as the reduced quorum goes. Quorum is still six, I believe. You have to have six to have a regular—

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It's seven—the chair and six.

The Chair: My understanding is that some committees have it at six.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Just to clarify, then, with reduced quorum we're talking about just receiving evidence.

The Chair: It would move it from three to four. This motion here would allow you to receive information with three. With the amendment, you would have to have four members in order to receive information.

Does everybody understand? Is there any further debate?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now we need a motion on the main motion as amended. Is there any discussion?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: We now move on to distribution of documents.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, if I might, I would move the motions on—and I think if everybody followed along on the translated version, we could safely do this—distribution of documents, working meals, witnesses' expenses, and in camera meeting transcripts. I think we could move all those in one motion.

The Chair: You've heard Mr. Storseth's suggestion. Is there any issue with that or any discussion?

Mr. Eyking.

• (1155)

Hon. Mark Eyking: Are there any changes from regular routine motions here?

The Chair: I'd have to check with the clerk, but I don't believe so.

Hon. Mark Eyking: I have no problem with that, unless somebody has changed it.

The Chair: Are you proposing a motion, Mr. Storseth, to adopt those as one?

Mr. Brian Storseth: Yes, I so move.

The Chair: You have heard the motion as moved by Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I just want to clarify one thing. I saw the clerk react to my question, but what is been presented is what the committee already does, isn't it? If there is a change, it must be discussed. If there is no change, I don't have a problem, because it was working well.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Clerk is saying that they're the same, André.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: You're rolling together which ones?

Mr. Brian Storseth: The distribution of documents, working meals, witnesses' expenses, and in camera meeting transcripts.

An hon. member: And staff at in camera meetings?

Mr. Brian Storseth: We're going to have to talk about that one. We want to make sure that you can have a party staffer there.

An hon. member: Okay, that's good.

Mr. Brian Storseth: You see? I'm trying to be open and honest with you.

The Chair: If it's okay with the committee, on staff at in camera meetings—

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Wait; that one's not on the table.

The Chair: Oh, it's not on your list. My apologies; I thought you had said it was part of it.

So it includes up to witnesses' expenses.

Mr. Brian Storseth: And in camera meeting transcripts.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Just name them.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Well, I have working meals, witnesses' expenses, in camera meeting transcripts, and distribution of documents.

The Chair: So it's those four.

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I just want some clarification. I have a comment to make about the presence of staff at in-camera meetings.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's going to be dealt with separately.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Thank you. That is what I wanted to clarify.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the motion?

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

The Chair: That would make the next one, then, staff at in camera meetings.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Bellavance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I have already had this discussion at other committees. I don't remember if the problem arose at this committee. I don't think that is a very serious problem, but it does limit us somewhat.

For example, my assistant is always here. France would be accompanied by her assistant. France may not be at the in camera sessions, but the Steering Committee meetings are usually in camera. I would be accompanied by my assistant. If a member of our whip's office wants to talk to me about something or wants to be here for some reason, my assistant will have to leave. I am speaking for all parties, I am not speaking just for us. I think that we should be able to always be accompanied by our staff plus a member of our party, be it someone from the leader's office or elsewhere. In other words, someone will have to leave if someone else comes in. I'm talking about one person, and not 25.

[English]

The Chair: At this point, if it's okay, I will read the way it was in the last session: that unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff person at an in camera meeting. That staff member could be a member from the House leader's office, the whip's office, or the research department of the party, or the member's office.

That's just how it was. That information was just handed to me by the clerk.

Mr. Bellavance, you're up.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I simply wanted to point out that that is why it is limited. We all have the right to be accompanied by one staff member, either from our office or from our party. I know that no one has ever raised the issue, but it could happen that my assistant would be present at an in camera meeting and that someone from the whip's staff from my party would also be present. Someone could point out that there would be one too many people with me. I would not want to do that to any of the others and I would not want anyone to do that to me either. We should allow for the presence of one member of our staff as well as one staff member from the party, who could come and go. We don't know what happens in such situations. As it stands, someone could make an issue of this, and say that there is one extra person in the room, and that therefore someone must leave.

• (1200)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chairman, I agree with Mr. Bellavance. He raises a good point. I feel it is important that we be able to have one staff member here as well as one additional person for each party. We all have a whip's office and we'd like to be able to have someone from that office if necessary. I would therefore move an amendment to deal with your concerns. It would read as follows:

[English]

In addition, each party shall be permitted to have one additional staff member attend in camera meetings.

[Translation]

Is that acceptable? In fact, that would be one person per party. This would include one person for each member, but each party would also have the right to have an additional staff member attend. It is therefore an issue of four other staff members at most in the room during in camera meetings.

[English]

The Chair: You've heard the proposed amendment by Mr. Lemieux. Is there any discussion on that amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: We need to have a vote on the main motion as amended, as moved by Mr. Hoback.

Is there discussion?

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

The Chair: That will take us to notice of motions.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Was it 48 hours last time?

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Wayne Easter: That's fine. Does anybody have a problem with 48 hours?

I so move, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We have a motion moved by Mr. Easter.

It would read the same as it does on the translated copy here, Wayne, but with "48 hours" added.

Hon. Wayne Easter: That's what it was last time. Sometimes you guys complained, but that's not unusual.

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I have a question that is really just a clarification to you, Chair. A "substantive motion" would mean whether it's related to the business of the day or not. Is that right?

I've been on other committees where, if you're in the midst of the business of the day—for example, you're setting and discussing an agenda—then you don't need 48 hours to actually drop a motion about setting the agenda, even though it's a substantive motion because you're talking about discussing what your future agenda is. If it's outside the business of the day, then you would need 48 hours.

So my question to you is this: are we talking about all substantive motions or are we talking about substantive motions outside the business of the day?

The Chair: I think the motion is fairly clear where it says "unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration", and I think it's probably my job as chair to use my discretion to make a decision based on whether it deals with the business of the day or whether it's new business.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That answers the question.

The Chair: Once again, I'll be as fair as I can on that.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That's fine. I didn't read that.

The Chair: Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I would like to point out to Mr. Lemieux that with the consent of the committee, any motion can be debated, even without the 48 hours' notice. This has happened in the past, when it was unanimous.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, I think it's unanimous consent.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: It does not happen often, but it has happened.

[English]

The Chair: Is there further discussion on the motion?

(Motion agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

•(1205)

The Chair: Now that we've dealt with routine motions, something that was brought to my attention beforehand by Barry is that we don't have a table for the media. I know we always have had one, so maybe we could request that.

I'm not sure, Madam Clerk, who we talk to about that.

We'll try to address that, Barry and Alex.

Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I suggest that we put it under Barry's name, because he is always there. In that way, it would be a table in his honour.

[English]

The Chair: Well, Alex might have something to say about that.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Chair, I'd like to put forward another motion concerning rounds of questioning. It's not here in the bilingual sheet we have, but I think it's important that we devote some time to discussing how long we'd like witnesses to present. When they come before us, I think it's fair that they know what their time limits are, and I think it's fair that we know what their time constraints are as well, because you'll be managing that, Chair, of course.

Secondly, although it's not a hard and fast rule, I think it's good for us to simply decide at this point how long the rounds of questioning may be. Of course, we can always deviate from that if there are particular circumstances, but at this early point in the life of the agriculture committee, I think it's good to have a game plan that we can agree on regarding how long witnesses are going to speak and our rounds. I've put forward a motion in that regard, called "Rounds of Questioning". I'll just read it out. It's on the English form. It says:

That witnesses shall be allowed up to ten (10) minutes to make their opening statement. During the questioning of witnesses, there shall be allocated seven (7) minutes for the first round of questioning, and thereafter five (5) minutes shall be allocated to each questioner in the second and subsequent rounds of questioning.

That is my motion, Chair.

The Chair: You've heard the motion.

I just have one comment, if you'll allow me. From time to time, in our two-hour meetings, we sometimes have them as split meetings, where our first witnesses are here for an hour and what have you. Of course, it would have to be approved by everyone, but as chair, probably in that case it would be my goal to request that the presentations may stay the same, or I might even ask the witnesses to shorten them a little bit to allow for more questioning, but maybe shorten all questions to five minutes, instead of seven and five minutes, just to try to make the rounds in that hour.

I don't think it needs to be part of the motion, but I just think it's fair to put that in front of everyone now, in case that happens down the road. And of course if the committee as a whole decides that that day it doesn't want to go that way, so be it. I take my direction from you.

I have Mr. Storseth and then Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I believe that's what we had last time, wasn't it?

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: We haven't had a problem in the past with being flexible if we were splitting a meeting up. I think it's worked, and if we adopt this and we're flexible, we're fine.

The Chair: Madam Clerk has just added at the end of the amendment you wrote, "at the discretion of the chair". That comes from the clerk. I don't know whether that could be accepted as friendly or not.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, that's a friendly amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I think that's implied anyway, Larry. When we had more witnesses here last time we worked well dropping back to five minutes for all rounds.

Brian made the point that this is the same as was done previously.

One issue that I do have a problem with, which is not in this motion—and maybe it doesn't have to be—is when we sometimes have six witnesses and we only have an hour; they never really have time to put their case. I think for the subcommittee, at least, we need to be conscious of that. If we're going to have a witness in, we really need time to do the in-depth inquiry that's needed rather than just passing them over.

The Chair: If I could, just to clarify, Wayne, where you're coming from on this, I'm wondering if we could direct the clerk in advance, when contacting our witnesses, in case we're down to an hour's time, to maybe explain to them how beneficial it might be to give the committee a hard copy in fairly good time—48 hours isn't bad, but even more than that is better—in order to review it. It's basically to try to cut down their verbal presentation at the start of the meeting, in order to allow for more questioning.

Is that kind of where you were going?

•(1210)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, that would be helpful.

The Chair: Does anybody have any problem with that?

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): I have one question, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Is it to deal with what we were just...?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead, Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: There will be some scenarios, possibly, where they will not have a hard copy presented. Will it restrict them in what they can present when they attend as a witness if they don't have a hard copy?

The Chair: I think they have to have it to us in advance. Has that not been the way?

Hon. Wayne Easter: We've had several cases where they haven't had a hard copy, Chair. There have been some issues. You've got to consider that many of these organizations are volunteers. I think most of them make a pretty good effort to have a written submission, but there have been cases where they haven't. We've given them pretty short notice and they've come and made their points, and that's fine.

I don't think we want to be too restrictive, but they know it's to their advantage to have a written document as well.

The Chair: Yes, and I wasn't in any way trying to punish a witness because they didn't have one. It's just simply to explain to them the advantage of getting us a hard copy in advance. It would actually be to their benefit I think if they did that.

Mr. Lemieux, and then Mr. Storseth.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you very much.

If there are two or three witnesses from the same organization, we'll give them 10 minutes in total. In other words, we give a maximum of 10 minutes per organization, and not to each person from that organization.

If we wish to give witnesses more time, we will have to ensure that we do not invite too many witnesses in the single hour. We have already tried to hear from more, but we invited 10 organizations to appear in the single hour. That is too many witnesses in one hour, because there is not enough time left to ask them questions or for them to be able to really present their ideas.

[English]

The Chair: If I could speak to these questions, unless directed otherwise by the committee I'm going to make it clear to the witnesses that if they have three from one organization, that gives them ten minutes, not ten minutes each. If you want me to do otherwise, I'm at your wishes, but that would be how I would read that one.

The other was when Pierre used the example of there being half a dozen to ten witnesses here and we had an hour. I would probably try and be fairly strict on holding them to five minutes—seven minutes at the most—but I would make it clear to them in advance that it's not going to be ten minutes.

Again, if the committee tells me otherwise, then I'm at your direction. I hope that answers those two questions.

Mr. Storseth, and then Mr. Bellavance.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I tend to agree with Mr. Easter. I think it's important that we don't put anything in a motion in this regard, simply because we want to allow maximum flexibility and your discretion when it comes to these things. I think it has worked well in the past. I think we should go forward with what we've had. It's worked very well. That leaves some discretion with you and the subcommittee.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: It is true that we have to hear from too many witnesses in a very short time. If there are several interesting witnesses who are interested in a given subject, it is up to the committee to allow them a second hour. If people tell me that they want to appear before the committee, I would not tell them that there are too many witnesses. We must decide together who will testify. I do not want to overstate the case and say that we will hear from everyone all the time. I have never presented a list of witnesses in order to filibuster and say that there are many witnesses and that we will therefore waste time. It is up to us to organize another meeting in order to give ourselves the time to hear from them.

I support your suggestion, Mr. Chairman, whereby, at a particular moment, if we have too many witnesses, we simply give them less than 10 minutes to make their statements. In any case, people understand that.

● (1215)

[English]

The Chair: To go from there, André, even five or six witnesses at ten minutes each takes up the biggest part of an hour. I guess I'm going to have to put a bit of faith in it. I'm going to try to keep them moving as much as possible. It's important to hear from our witnesses, and we certainly don't want to make it look, intentional or otherwise, like we don't want to hear what they have to say. We want to be fair. It's for the sake of time and allowing as many questions as possible.

I don't think ten in an hour meeting has ever happened before, and it probably won't happen again. Having ten in two one-hour meetings would probably be an extreme.

Is there any further discussion on that issue?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I would like to put forward one final motion, Chair, regarding the speaking order so we have some idea of what order you'll follow when you are allowing people to ask questions. We're all investing time in the committee, preparing before the committee, and listening attentively when witnesses are presenting. Then we have the opportunity to ask questions. I think it's important, to the maximum extent possible, and if time allows, that each member be given an opportunity to participate in the meeting. That stimulates interest and stimulates dialogue. And it ensures that everybody has an investment in the meeting, because they have an opportunity to dialogue with the witnesses.

With that in mind, I'd like to propose my motion regarding speaking order. You have it on the English side, but I'll read it so it can be translated:

The order of questions for the first round of questioning shall be as follows: Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative. Questioning during the second round shall alternate between the opposition members and government members in the following fashion: Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, based on the principle that each committee member should have a full opportunity to question the witnesses. If time permits further rounds shall be at the discretion of the chair.

That would end the wording of my motion. Again, it's just to highlight the fact that.... I think we've all be on committees before at times when some members didn't participate because they didn't have the time to participate. They hadn't been allocated a question. We're all MPs. We're all elected. We're all representing regions and particular interests, and that's why I think it's important that, to the maximum extent possible, we all be given an opportunity to participate directly in each committee meeting.

The Chair: I believe this is very close to exactly what we had last time for speaking order.

We'll have Mr. Atamanenko and then Mr. Bellavance.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: This is the motion. Is it appropriate for me to make an amendment to the motion?

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I would like to make an amendment to the motion.

The amendment would be that in the second round, my party, the NDP, would have a chance to ask an additional question. In other words, the way the motion is now, in the first round we're number three. In the second round, it's possible that I or Malcolm would not have a chance to ask a question, depending on how things went. I found that in the last Parliament that happened from time to time towards the end.

When I first got here, I always seemed to have a question in the second round. I would like to have a guarantee, through my subamendment, that my party will have a chance in the second round to ask a five-minute question, whether it's number three or four. I realize that each member here needs the opportunity to ask a question. But I also realize that we represent parties, and this would give me a chance a second time to represent the point of view that my party may have that the other parties may not. I would like to have that as an amendment to this motion.

The Chair: On that issue, whatever happens in the discussion, Alex, I think from time to time we've all had a question that maybe we didn't think of at the time. They come up. But you always have the opportunity to approach one of the other members of the committee about asking it.

Having said that, we have an amendment. Does everybody understand what the amendment is?

We'll have Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Perhaps I'll present this as a friendly amendment, Alex.

To understand exactly what we're going to be voting on, we could put NDP after the last Conservative. It would go Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, NDP, for the sake of actually inserting text into the motion so that we know what we're voting on when we vote on the subamendment. That's where I would propose, as a friendly amendment, we put the NDP slot.

The Chair: In essence, Mr. Atamanenko, after every member has had a chance to ask questions, it would move the NDP to the number one spot, starting off, whereas right now, I believe, it would start

with the Liberals and the Bloc and then the NDP. It would actually start with the NDP again.

• (1220)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: No. Mr. Atamanenko mentioned he wanted it somewhere in round two, so I'm proposing it be at the end of round two. That way every member will have had an opportunity to participate, and that member will have a second opportunity to participate. It could also be the first person at the beginning of round three, when people will get to participate a second time.

The Chair: I should follow my sheet here. I apologize to Mr. Bell.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: We can discuss it a bit more, but I'm proposing a friendly amendment that at the end of the second round it be Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, NDP, based on the principle that each committee member should have a full opportunity to question the witnesses.

The Chair: Mr. Bellavance and Mr. Storseth are next, and then Mr. Atamanenko.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Chairman, we usually have two rounds.

I would like the clerk to follow along with me. I see no major difference between what Mr. Lemieux has moved and what we currently have, that is to say what we are working with. For the moment, the order in the first round is the following: the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party and the NDP. In the second round, it is the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party. Is that right? Normally, almost everyone has an opportunity to speak. I do not see what the big difference is, aside from adding on the NDP after the Conservative Party in the second turn.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lemieux can correct me, but in the amendment he just moved to his original motion, instead of allowing every member of the committee to speak before anyone had a second round, the NDP would have a second question at the end of the second round. So potentially, four members of the committee wouldn't have had a chance to ask a question yet.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I have two points. One, you can't propose an amendment to your own amendment. Second, you can't propose an amendment that would negate any part of the actual amendment or the motion you're talking about.

To put our cards on the table and be honest, and we're talking about the principle that every member can speak before another member gets to speak, André, if you were to extrapolate beyond the Bloc, then the Conservatives, and then the Liberals, you would have Conservative, Conservative. That's how it would go because of the change in committee structure.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: I did not understand.

[English]

Mr. Brian Storseth: The second round would go Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Conservative. That way everybody would get an opportunity to speak once.

Mr. Atamanenko's motion or amendment wasn't to put the NDP at the back of the line; his amendment was to guarantee that the NDP got an opportunity to speak in the second round. I don't know how you could possibly do that without putting the NDP at the beginning, in which case a Liberal member would potentially have to give up their opportunity to speak.

I propose that we stick with what we had in the past, which seems to have worked. We were guided by the principle of proportionality. Any time I've been in an election, the NDP has always talked about proportional representation. Committees are structured under proportional representation. It allows every member of this committee to have the opportunity to speak. It gives the NDP member more time than four of the other Conservative members, because we only get five minutes to your seven, so already you're getting more time.

I think it's very important that everybody gets the opportunity to speak once and ask questions once, should that opportunity arise. Sometimes we have so many witnesses, and that's what Mr. Bellavance was talking about before. Maybe we need more time; maybe that's how to handle this. But I think it's important that every member of this committee gets the opportunity to speak.

If you recall, in the last Parliament—and I don't want to beat up on somebody who's not here—the chair often took a round of questioning every once in a while as well, which set things back even more. So I think it's important we throw all our cards on the table and are honest about this. The idea of proportionality is there and we should stick to it. That's what we went with in the past, and that's what we should move forward with in the future.

The Chair: On your point of order, Mr. Storseth, I'm going to make the ruling that it was originally Mr. Lemieux's motion and Mr. Atamanenko amended it, and then there was...I don't know whether you'd call it a friendly amendment or a subamendment that Mr. Lemieux tried to make on Mr. Atamanenko's amendment. So I'm going to rule that discussions go on.

I have two more names on the list. I actually have Mr. Atamanenko first—

Mr. Brian Storseth: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I hate to be a stickler, but you know we have to get this out in the open. It does state under the Standing Orders—and I can refer to Marleau and Montpetit for you—that you cannot put an amendment on a motion that negates the original motion itself. Mr. Atamanenko's or Mr. Lemieux's amendments to the original motion would negate the principle of proportionality and everybody getting the opportunity to speak. I don't know how you could rule that it doesn't, so you must get rid of the amendment.

The Chair: So what you're saying is that we need to vote on the amendment, and I'm not—

Mr. Brian Storseth: What I'm saying is that the amendment is not a valid amendment. It's not a movable amendment because it negates the substance of the original motion.

The Chair: Alex, do you have it written down?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: No, it's something to the effect that in the second round my party, or I, get a chance for a question. It can be third or fourth; it doesn't matter. It's not at the end of a long list, possibly getting a question when everybody has had a chance. In a sense it goes against what's in the premise that each committee member should have full opportunity, which is what Brian is saying, so we may have to look at that.

I want to make sure that in the second round of questions, as a representative of my party I have a chance to ask that five-minute question. That has not always been the case in the past. How we do it....

Mr. Brian Storseth: And you will, after the Conservatives.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Not necessarily.

Mr. Brian Storseth: According to the list.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Well, that doesn't always happen.

Mr. Brian Storseth: But Alex, in all honesty, the last Conservative is not going to get to speak very often either.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, are you dealing with the point of order?

The Chair: I'm in discussion with the clerk. We've both agreed that he's amending the speaking order to what Mr. Lemieux moved, and we're going to deem that allowable. We can discuss and vote on that amendment.

Mr. Brian Storseth: But it's not. Even Mr. Lemieux's own amendment doesn't go along with the principle of one member—

• (1230)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I haven't amended—

Mr. Brian Storseth: Yes, you amended. You said that you would put the NDP—

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I proposed a friendly amendment.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Regardless, if the NDP goes in anywhere other than after the last Conservative, you have....

Mr. Lemieux stated, and I quote, “based on the principle that each committee member should have full opportunity to question the witnesses”. That is the principle of the amendment, and injecting the NDP anywhere in the speaking order other than at the end goes against the substance of the motion.

I don't know how you can—

The Chair: I know where you're coming from, Mr. Storseth. Any amendment, basically, changes a motion.

I think it's a fairly clear-cut thing, and either you're in support of it or you're not.

Mr. Richards, I have a speaking order here.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Actually, I want to interject on the point of order, if I can.

The Chair: On the point of order? Okay.

Mr. Blake Richards: I just want to support what Mr. Storseth is saying here. I understand that every amendment does change the intent of a motion, but in this case Mr. Storseth is absolutely correct. The two conflict with each other directly. In other words, in order to allow the NDP to be inserted anywhere in that order prior to all members speaking, they are now in direct conflict. So you now have a motion that is going to conflict with the other.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, if it would be of service, I have my Marleau and Montpetit for the clerk to read up on.

The Chair: I know there's probably nobody in this room who knows it any better than you. However, this is one of those issues where the only way you can have an amendment on it is for it to be contrary to something in it. We have to let democracy take its place here, and I think we should have a vote on it. That will deal with the point of order.

I have two more speakers—Mr. Easter and Mr. Atamanenko—and I'm going to let you close up, Mr. Atamanenko, because it's your amendment.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We know that Brian must sleep with that big book at night. You're probably right about the rules, Brian.

I think there's a principle at stake here, Mr. Chair. While I sympathize with Alex and his position and could in fact agree to it if there were a second member here at committee, I do think everyone who is an official member of the committee should have the right to speak and raise questions prior to someone else's having a second round if they want to take that opportunity; if they don't, that's fine. You do sit in committee sometimes, and there are some members who really don't get an opportunity to raise a question for several weeks. That's not really fair, especially when you're having hearings that are only an hour long—and we've seen that in the past.

I see nothing wrong with the original pattern of questioning that we had in the previous committee. Then if there's an opportunity to come in the second time, that's great. In Alex's case, he would have 12 minutes, where somebody else had only five, and quite a few might have zero. I think you have to go through the roster first.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Atamanenko, do you have any closing remarks?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I guess this will go down as a point in history where I actually disagree with Wayne, but that's good.

I maintain that I believe my party should be represented in the second. We have only two rounds. We don't have three rounds, from my experience. My party should have a chance in the second round, the five-minute round of questions, to ask a question. How that happens and where we're put or where I'm put doesn't matter. That's the principle I'm going from because of the divergent views that all of us represent, which should have a chance to be represented here.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Atamanenko.

I'm going to call the question.

Mr. Brian Storseth: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, what are we voting on?

The Chair: We're voting on Mr. Atamanenko's amendment.

Mr. Brian Storseth: And Mr. Lemieux didn't have an amendment on it?

The Chair: No, he did not. It was a suggestion.

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: Is everybody's clear on the main motion that Mr. Lemieux read?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Do we have any other motions?

Sorry?

•(1235)

Hon. Wayne Easter: André wants to speak.

The Chair: Mr. Bellavance.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: As I was asking earlier on, I would like to know if there is a difference between what Mr. Lemieux has proposed and how we normally worked. It is the same thing in my opinion.

[English]

The Chair: It's generally the same thing.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: You will ensure that every member of the committee has an opportunity to speak as was formerly the case?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, and the only difference, Mr. Bellavance, is that the composition of the committee from parties is slightly different. That's the only change.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Fine.

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: I understand. There is one less Liberal and one more Conservative member.

[English]

The Chair: Are there any other motions to do with routine motions?

We've dealt with the composition of the steering committee here. I would suggest that we use our time on Thursday for that steering committee to meet, if that's suitable. We can get a room or we can do it in my office, whichever your preference is. The clerk will get us a room and notify everybody.

Mr. Atamanenko, and then Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I think we have to be careful. We need translation services for the steering committee, if I'm not mistaken. We would probably have to meet in an official...

The Chair: I apologize. I never thought of that.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Is it at the same time, 11 o'clock?

The Chair: Yes, it's 11 to 1. I'm just suggesting that the subcommittee block time for this Thursday, that's all.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd just like to take the opportunity before we wrap up to give notice of motion on a motion. I'll read it into the record, and then I'll allow the clerk to take 48 hours to translate it and distribute it to the committee members.

My motion would read:

That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food conduct a study of the Competition Act and make recommendations on potential changes in light of the global economy and the effect the lack of competition and pricing is having on the farmer's ability to produce and sell their products.

I'll present that to the clerk.

The Chair: I'm just asking that you slow down a little bit for the translator.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I'll present it to the clerk, and you can give it to everybody.

The Chair: That's good.

Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I'd also like to give notice that I have a motion I would like to read into the record.

That the Committee study the effect of current regulations on the competitiveness of farm products produced in Canada versus similar products which are imported from other countries. In this review, the committee should study the current validity of existing regulations and identify those regulations which are no longer relevant in order to reduce the regulatory burden on farmers.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Chair, I'd also like to put forward a notice of motion.

That the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food study International Trade and Market Development to the benefit of our farmers.

The Chair: Do you have a copy of that?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Yes, I'll write it out.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I have a question for you, Mr. Chair.

I really don't see a problem with any of these motions that are being put forward, but there are a number of other issues that certainly we'll be putting forward to the subcommittee on agenda. I want to know how those issues will be.... For instance, concerning listeriosis, we weren't given the secret document that we asked for in the Parliament before last. We need to hear from the woman who heads up the inquiry, Ms. Weatherill. We need to do that right away. There's the whole problem of program accountability with the department, that the cost-of-production moneys haven't gotten out there, that the AgriStability and AgriInvest seed money has just not been on the ground.

• (1240)

The Chair: Are these not issues to bring up at the...?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Well, yes, but my point is this.... The other one that I should raise is the product-of-Canada definition, which the Prime Minister's office imposed over the wishes of this committee. That also needs to be looked at closely. We recommended 85%. The Prime Minister overruled that and went to 98%. Now we've made the problem even worse in that Canadian product cannot be labelled product of Canada because of either sugars or sauces that go into it. So we need to deal with some of those issues as well, and I think they're of a more immediate concern than some of the issues on the motion.

So my question to you is this. On all the issues that come forward, including these motions, how are we going to prioritize this so that the committee itself decides which are the first issues to be looked at?

The Chair: Well, I think you said it, Mr. Easter. That's up to the committee to deal with and prioritize on Thursday, unless I'm....

Hon. Mark Eyking: The steering committee will.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: I have a shopping list also, and I think that's why we're coming to committee on Thursday, to give our priorities to the steering committee. Then we will bring them to the committee. Is that correct? Then we will decide whether it's a motion, whether it's this, and we will put them on a list. Then we will get the dates and we will move on.

If I understand correctly, that's the procedure we're following.

The Chair: Yes.

Presenting these notices of motion—and you'll have to speak to the gentlemen who brought them—doesn't circumvent what's to happen on Thursday.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Hoback was first.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make sure that the intent was just to notify you that that's one of the topics I'd like to discuss in committee. Not by any means is it to be given any type of priority. It's just that it's an important issue for farmers throughout western Canada, and they want to see it addressed. That was the intent behind it.

The Chair: Okay.

I have Mr. Lemieux, then Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Not me.

The Chair: Oh, okay.

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do want to say that as a private member who doesn't have the opportunity to sit at the.... It was the opposition that said we're not allowed to have anybody other than the chair at the subcommittee meeting. I just want to make sure that one of the things that my constituents want to talk about is out there, and you guys can discuss whether or not it's a priority. I'm not advocating any changes to the way you did things in the past.

I do want to say I'm a little surprised at Mr. Easter's hesitation on product of Canada since he was the one at the last Parliament who tried to take credit for all the work the committee did on it. But that doesn't need to be talked about today, Mr. Chair.

Some hon. members: Oh! Oh!

Hon. Wayne Easter: I do have to speak on that, Mr. Chair, because the committee's work, where we actually heard witnesses, heard from CFA and others.... I think the committee's recommendation on product of Canada would have been the right way to go, but as is typical of the Prime Minister's office, they ran it how they saw fit, and I think instead of listening to the people who know the industry, who listened to the witnesses, now the Prime Minister's office has created another problem. That's my point, and I think we need to look at whether we can get back to 85%, because we have

people calling who actually produce product of Canada and they can't label it "product of Canada". So the Prime Minister's office, with the micromanagement they do on everything, has created another problem.

The Chair: I know, Mr. Easter, in closing, the only concerns that I've heard from feedback is "Why the heck didn't we go with 100%?" Of course you explained the reason why. But those are the only complaints I've had, and that includes processors.

So I guess it's obviously different across the country.

Unless there's something else, I'm going to...

Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Chair, I hate to belabour this, but at the end of the day, when Mr. Easter is trying to do his revisionist history, Mr. Steckle was on the other side also advocating for 99% or 100%. You can't just come after everything is said and done and say, "Oh wait, I think we should do it a different way".

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Storseth.

I declare this meeting adjourned.

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