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—
Chair

Mr. James Bezan

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•(0905)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Normand Radford): Honourable members, I see a quorum.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106.(1) your first item is to elect the chair. Do I have motions to that effect?

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): I'd like to nominate Mr. Bezan, please.

The Clerk: Mr. Calkins moves that Mr. Bezan take the chair.

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

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

The Clerk: Congratulations, Mr. Bezan, you are now chair of the committee.

[English]

Our next item is to elect the vice-chairs.

[Translation]

There are two vice-chair positions: one must be a member of the official opposition, and the other, a member of another opposition party.

Are there any motions to that effect?

Mr. McGuinty.

[English]

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): I would like to nominate, on behalf of the official opposition, Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia as vice-chair.

The Clerk: Mr. McGuinty names Mr. Scarpaleggia as a vice-chair for the official opposition. Is it the pleasure of the committee to accept this?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Congratulations.

[Translation]

We will now elect the second vice-chair.

Mr. Ouellet.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): I move that Mr. Bernard Bigras be elected second vice-chair.

The Clerk: Mr. Ouellet moves that Mr. Bigras be elected the second vice-chair. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Thanks for the vote of confidence in allowing me to chair this esteemed committee. I am looking forward to the work we are about to undertake.

What we will do is go right into routine motions and set the ground rules for the committee for the upcoming session. After that, I wouldn't mind just going around and having everybody introduce themselves, because there are some new players on this committee, including myself. I am looking forward to finding out more about you and exactly what environmental issues are your personal interests as we go forward. Then we'll set up a time for the steering committee to meet to set out our agenda and hopefully get to work next week.

With that, we're going to look at the motions that were passed last year. They were actually put into the briefing book binders that Norm had circulated, and he also has them circulating right now.

Everybody has a copy of the routine motions in front of them. We'll go through them one at a time. We're going to be using the ones that were adopted by the committee for the 39th Parliament, second session.

The first one is services of analysts from the Library of Parliament. The one that was passed read:

That the Committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist in its work.

Are there any proposed changes to that motion?

Mr. Warawa.

•(0910)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

We're recommending that one more sentence be added at the end: that these services may be requested at the discretion of the chair.

The Chair: No, it says that in the motion.

Mr. Mark Warawa: That's right. It's fine the way it is.

The Chair: It's fine the way it is.

Is there any other discussion on that first one?

Would somebody move the motion on the services of analysts from the Library of Parliament?

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We're going to be joined by our analysts. We have Tim Williams and Penny Becklumb, who were with the committee last time.

Do you have any opening comments before we move on to the other routine motions?

Mr. Tim Williams (Committee Researcher): First of all, I would like to congratulate everybody.

Second, I'm not sure exactly how familiar you are with our services, but we're here to serve the committee as best we can on the subject matter at hand. We'll pass around our cards later. Feel free to contact us at any time for any questions, and we'll do our best to help you out.

The Chair: Penny.

Ms. Penny Becklumb (Committee Researcher): Hi and good morning.

The Chair: Okay, thanks.

Let's move on to the next routine motion, which concerns the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. The one that was passed in the last session was that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be established and be composed of the chair, the two vice-chairs, and a member of the other opposition party. The motion was later amended to include the parliamentary secretary as a member of the subcommittee.

Any changes to that motion?

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you, Chair.

We've spent quite a bit of time on the routine motions, and this is a suggestion. Some of this will be covered by what's already in there, but this is what we're proposing: that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be composed of the chair, the parliamentary secretary, and a member from each of the opposition parties; that quorum of the subcommittee shall consist of at least three members, one of whom must be from the government and one member from the opposition; and that each member of the subcommittee shall be permitted to have one assistant attend at any meetings of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

The Chair: Mr. Warawa is proposing an amendment. Is there any discussion?

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Would you read that again, please?

The Chair: Mr. Warawa, would you reread that?

Mr. Mark Warawa: The amendment proposes that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be composed of the chair, the parliamentary secretary, and a member from each of the opposition parties—so everybody would be represented there, plus the chair—that the quorum for the subcommittee shall consist of at

least three members, one of whom must be from the government and one member from the opposition, and that each member of the subcommittee shall be permitted to have one assistant attend at any meetings of the subcommittee.

• (0915)

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, I'm in agreement with the amendment with the exception of including the parliamentary secretary. My preference would be that they be an ordinary member.

The Chair: Monsieur Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): It's not enough to submit an amendment: the member must also explain it. I would like to know the reasons why the parliamentary secretary wants to sit on the subcommittee. Is he telling us that it is his intention, ultimately, to advise us of government initiatives in order to better guide the committee's work?

Ultimately, he is telling us that the government will now have eyes on the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure. If it is to facilitate the work of the committee and not to ensure that the minister can keep an eye on what is happening in the committee, I have no objections to this. These are two different things. Could he explain in greater detail the intent behind the amendment?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you for those questions.

In the first half of the 39th Parliament, the parliamentary secretary was not on the subcommittee. In the second half I was there, at the suggestion of John Godfrey, and that worked better.

The purpose of the subcommittee is to provide suggestions. Rather than this body, we break down to a smaller group and discuss a possible agenda. That proposed agenda, if we can reach consensus in that smaller group, is forwarded on. We found it to be a much better use of our time to have me there. Otherwise, I was not able to share with the committee what the government would like to see.

Of course, the committee is master of its own destiny, and we can move on, but it was important to have representation from the government at that committee.

The Chair: Mr. McGuinty.

[*Translation*]

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Bigras, if I remember correctly, at the beginning of the 39th Parliament, there was a discussion about having a Conservative member and the parliamentary secretary. There were two government members, along with the chair, and a member from each opposition party. What Mr. Warawa is asking today is simply that he sit on the steering committee, and not another member. So, we are talking about one government member and one member from each opposition party.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: So this specifies that the representative of the governing party will be the parliamentary secretary.

[English]

The Chair: Right, and in that case the chair would maintain his impartiality at the steering committee.

Mr. Warawa has a motion on the floor. Is there any further discussion?

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

The Chair: The next motion is on time limits for witnesses' statements and questioning:

That witnesses be given ten (10) minutes for their opening statement and that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated ten (10) minutes for the first questioner of each party; and that thereafter five (5) minutes be allocated to each subsequent questioner, alternating between government and opposition parties, and that no member be given a second opportunity to ask a question until all members have had an opportunity to ask a question.

Is there any discussion?

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, the first part of the procedure is perfectly acceptable: ten minutes as we go around per party. That's consistent with the way the committees are supposed to be set up. It's supposed to be representative of the parties.

I am going to object in the same way that my representative before me has objected, that it is unfair to then turn to it being by individual. It's inconsistent with the procedure, the way the committees are supposed to be run.

The practical effect is that the NDP never gets a second question. I think we could probably find some kind of halfway compromise, but we need to accommodate.

I should have at least one and a half people here. Nobody was willing to cut themselves in half, so it's just me. I think I can fulfill the role of one and a half, but only if I'm given fair opportunity in the committee. I think we need to find some kind of fair compromise so that my party is also fairly represented in questioning witnesses.

• (0920)

The Chair: Monsieur Ouellet.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Chair, if we add up the minutes, what my colleague has just said is not fair. The NDP gets the floor once, but for 10 minutes. The Liberals get to speak three times, for a total of 20 minutes. If we divide that by three, it equals seven minutes each. The Bloc Québécois gets ten plus five minutes, for a total of 15 minutes; that also works out to seven and a half minutes. So, given the number of NDP members, I think that this party's right to speak for 10 minutes is quite fair in relation to that of the other parties.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you. Good discussion.

I also did some quick math. If in the first round we had seven minutes, and then in the second round we had five minutes, we would use 63 minutes in total if we had a first and a second round. If

we allow approximately an hour for the witnesses, there is an hour and an hour.

If we have what's suggested right now, the first round being 10 minutes and the second and subsequent rounds being five minutes, we'll use up 75 minutes.

I think we often do use an hour for the witnesses. So I'd suggest seven minutes for the first round and five minutes for the second round, and if there is time after that, we could start off with another round of five minutes. It would be Liberal, Bloc, NDP, and Conservative for a third round.

I think the principle of everybody here is that we're all individuals working hard, and we're here because we have a passion for the environment. Everybody should have an opportunity to ask a question before a member in this committee has a second opportunity.

The other thing is that Mr. McGuinty and I were talking yesterday, and he made quite a good suggestion. If a member wanted to share his or her time, and if it was the member's turn and they said they would like to give their seven minutes or five minutes to one of their colleagues, then the member would have that freedom. I think that should be included. I think it's a good suggestion.

The Chair: Do we need to make that part of a motion, or can that just be a rule-of-thumb agreement between parties?

Mr. David McGuinty: I think it's at your discretion, Chair.

If I might build on that, I would go as far as saying that, in the event Ms. Duncan has something perfectly important to say, I think the question of substitutability might even go between parties. If there's a feeling that Ms. Duncan has not had a chance to finish her line of questioning and has something particularly probative to ask of witnesses, I don't see why we would be precluded from having one member say they'd like to give two minutes or some of their time to any member of this committee. I think the idea that each member is able to come to this committee and be active is important.

The Chair: I think that's important as well.

Are there any further comments?

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, I find Mr. Warawa's compromise probably a fair one. I'm not so great at math that I can figure out whether or not I will actually get a second question. If I can trust the math of my fellow committee members, that sounds fair to me. It also means we move on more quickly to the other parties.

I appreciate Mr. McGuinty's offer. I was going to suggest the same thing, that in some cases I may want to offer some of my time to some of the other members.

I come from committees in Alberta where we actually work by consensus. I would prefer that we try to set an example on the Hill and try to move in that direction. I'll try to be as accommodating as possible, but obviously the tone is important. If there's a fair tone, then I will feel the same way.

The Chair: Mr. Warawa and then Mr. Watson.

Mr. Mark Warawa: I have a suggested amendment. I think it provides that.

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

• (0925)

The Chair: You're making that as a separate motion.

Let's deal with the first motion, which is time limits.

Mr. Mark Warawa: It's the time, which is seven.

The Chair: Let's move that one first, and then I'll let you go.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, can I speak to that?

The Chair: We have to finish off the first motion we're on before we get to this motion.

Ms. Linda Duncan: But it's different from the first time it was presented.

The Chair: No, that's the second motion.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Okay, that's the second motion.

The Chair: Before we vote on the motion as seven and five.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I'm not going to agree to reducing my time if the second round excludes me. That would be absurd.

The Chair: Essentially what they're saying is that the first round is a seven-minute round, then there's a five-minute round, which is the rest of the members, and then a third round would be back to the first round with the same rotation, but at five minutes.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Briefly, we're speaking to the seven minutes? Okay. I've had this experience with the transport committee, in my other committee duties. We found, with the really collegial atmosphere, that the seven-minute rounds actually produced a third round of questions, which then offered an additional question to the New Democrats. That's been the practice, and I've been on that committee for over a year. I think that efficiency of lowering the time limit to seven got far more questions on the floor. I'm in support of the amendment.

The Chair: That's been my experience on the agriculture committee as well. With the seven and five we always get to a third round, and then all parties get one more question at the end on the third round.

Monsieur Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Even if we cut the time allocation in the first round, I doubt we will get to a third round. Perhaps the clerk could guide us. I think that the third round will prove increasingly difficult. Even if we reduce the time allocation during the first round from ten to seven minutes, I doubt that we will get through a full third round. So we should look at the time that will be granted.

[*English*]

The Chair: Another way we can manage this—and it's my suggestion as chair and I did it at the agriculture committee—is that we never have more than four witnesses at the table at a time. Instead of taking an hour for witnesses, the most you're going to take is 30 to 40 minutes. That leaves more time for questioning and a fuller discussion.

Madam Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I understood the motion by Mr. Warawa to be similar to the official languages, which I think is fair, reasonable, and practicable. The first round per party is seven minutes; the second round per party is five minutes; and then you go to the third round for five minutes. That's what I understood was being recommended.

The recommendation that is coming forward, as I understand it now, is not fair. It is probably going to end up reducing my time, not increasing my ability—and not just mine, but I think that of all the parties.

So I think the official languages is the best compromise: seven minutes; then five minutes; and then if you have a third round, five minutes. I'd even defer to having the first questions by the Conservatives members in the third round.

The Chair: Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Well, I think the timing is the first question. That's the motion that's on the floor, and then we can go into the sequence of questioning.

Is that okay?

The Chair: Okay.

The way the motion reads on time allotment is that that the first round per party is seven minutes, and the second round for remaining members is five minutes, with a rotation between opposition and government members. That's the motion on the floor from Mr. Warawa.

Is there any further discussion?

A final comment, and then Mr. Trudeau.

Go ahead, Mark.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Elaborating of what you just said, Chair, the principle that nobody gets a second question until everybody has had a chance—

The Chair: A chance to ask one.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I would simply like to make a comment.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have Mr. Trudeau first.

Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Could I suggest that we map this out and actually time it and look at what it looks like? I'm new to this committee, new to any committee actually, and the numbers flying around are unclear. I would like to count the timing.

• (0930)

The Chair: We can do the mapping and deal with it as a first point of business at our next full committee meeting—if that's the suggestion.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: I'm just asking if we could go through it now, seven minutes for this party, seven minutes for that party, and seven minutes—

The Chair: Okay, we'll do it really fast.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: —so we could actually map it out and see what sort of time....

The Chair: Okay, we'll do that.

Mr. Radford will just quickly map it out.

Monsieur Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I don't want to throw a spanner in the works, but I would remind the committee that, quite often, when the minister appears, he does so during the first hour. If the first round goes from ten to seven minutes, we are cutting the time which members have to question the minister. Quite often, the minister appears during the first hour and public officials during the second hour. Personally, I would prefer to be able to ask the minister questions for as long as possible when he appears. If we go from ten to seven minutes per questioner and then we add the three minutes lost per political party, we realize that we don't have a lot of time in which to ask the minister questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was trying to pick up on what Mr. Bigras was saying. If the minister appears for an hour, nobody has less time, because an hour is still an hour. What we're really talking about is how we divvy up the pie in that first hour.

If you take a look at the first round, if it's seven minutes, those seven minutes times four are 28 minutes. So we spend the first half hour basically on the first round. The likelihood of getting all the way through the second round in a one-hour session is that it's not going to happen. The likelihood is that we'll have 10 minutes of presentation by the minister, followed by a half an hour for the first round; so that eats up the first 40 minutes.

Then you're going to have an opportunity for one Liberal, one Bloc, and two Conservatives to ask questions for five minutes. And that will take up the last 20 minutes, given the current structure of that. So the likelihood is that in a one-hour session, we're not even going to get to every member of the committee for them to have an opportunity to ask questions.

But the question that I think most committee members have is what does that do for our particular party in terms of the time that we have in that first particular hour? And if you look at it from that perspective, I think if any party were to be short-changed, it would

be the governing party, because we would have two members who wouldn't even have an opportunity to ask questions.

So when you look at it from that perspective, there's no other way we can divvy this up to make it 100% or completely fair for everybody at the table, but we can get to a reasonable semblance of what's fair and give most members an opportunity to ask a question.

The Chair: The one thing that applies as well with ministers—it's just been common practice of all committees—is that ministers are not time-allocated. They can present for as long as they wish or as short as they want.

I'll let Mr. Warawa have the floor.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Bigras brings up a very good point, Chair. I thank my colleague Mr. Calkins.

I'd suggest that if we have the rule that witnesses be allowed 10 minutes each, then you're limiting the minister to 10 minutes. I would suggest that the time allocated during questioning for the minister be allocated at the discretion of the chair. If there's more time needed, let the chair...because with the minister, it's quite a different situation.

As a guide for normal witnesses, each group of presenters—sometimes with one organization, we'll have more than one presenter—would have a maximum of 10 minutes. An individual would have 10, and, as you suggest, Chair, there would be a maximum of four witnesses or groups of witnesses, for a total of 40 minutes. Then if we have an hour or 63 minutes of questioning for first and second rounds, we will very definitely have a third round if things are kept very tight.

I would suggest that we add that time allocation during questioning of a minister be at the discretion of the chair. It gives flexibility.

The Chair: Just before we move on, on the issue of ministers, on page 848 of Marleau and Montpetit, in chapter 20, there's a whole paragraph on time for opening remarks and questioning of witnesses. Near the end of the paragraph, it says:

Each committee seeks to balance, as best it can, the desire to ensure that representatives of all parties have the opportunity to put questions. As well, some committees adopt special rules for the questioning of Ministers.

So if we wish to, we can adopt a special rule, and we can put a time limit on the minister himself.

• (0935)

Mr. Mark Warawa: I'd like to suggest as a friendly amendment that time allocation during questioning of the minister be at your discretion, Chair.

The Chair: It can be at our discretion, and something we can agree upon, depending on the amount of time we have with the minister.

Mr. David McGuinty: The difficulty with that, Mr. Chair, is that past performances would lead some members of the committee to be skeptical. Things have changed, there's no question. The minister has changed. I don't know whether we're contemplating more overhead presentations, videos, powerpoints.

I think it would be reasonable to suggest to the minister that 15 minutes is an appropriate period of time to get the message out. It is important for us. We don't have a lot of time, and I really am sensitive to what Monsieur Bigras said and what Ms. Duncan said. We all want to have a chance to ask the minister the probative questions that we're supposed to here in this process. So I would recommend 15 minutes for the minister. I think we're all mature, and if he's going to go to 17 minutes, I don't think anyone is going to jump out of their seats, but it would be very helpful, I think, to give him and his staff some guidance.

The Chair: Mr. Radford, you laid out how the breakdown of minutes works out, so if we do have a seven-minute round, the first round is 28 minutes. The second round is 35 minutes. It works out that the NDP gets seven minutes, the Bloc Québécois 12 minutes, Liberals 15 minutes, and Conservatives 27 minutes.

So that is the breakdown, and that would be fairly representative of the composition in the House of Commons. That would still leave time to get to a third round, which gives every party a supplementary question.

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, the committees are not supposed to be the same as the House of Commons. We're supposed to be by party. I have yet to hear a good rationale as to why we would not follow the rules and procedures set out by official languages. I think it is eminently fair and reasonable that it would be party to party. By the third round, it would be seven minutes, five minutes, five minutes. I said I'd be quite willing in that third round to simply go through Conservatives. There's no reason why the Conservative members can't share their time with each other and be fair and reasonable, but it should be party to party. That's the purpose here, to have a discourse from different perspectives on policies and laws put forward by the government, and the Conservatives have time in caucus, which we don't have.

The Chair: Okay.

So what we have is a motion on the floor from Mr. Warawa, with an amendment proposed by Mr. McGuinty time-limiting ministers to a 15-minute presentation.

Are there any other comments on.... Well, we'll first vote on Mr. McGuinty's amendment at 15 minutes. Or is it a friendly amendment?

Mr. David McGuinty: It's a friendly amendment.

The Chair: It's a friendly amendment, so it's agreed upon.

So we're voting on the main motion. We're down into time allocation, and we're at seven minutes, with the addition of the minister being limited to 15 minutes, and members can share their time.

Those are the two amendments. So we're down to a seven-minute first questioning from each party, members have the ability to share time, and the minister is allocated 15 minutes for his opening presentation.

Any final comments?

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: I have one quick question. The speaking order—we're going to be dealing with it as a separate motion?

The Chair: We'll deal with that as a separate motion.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, no further discussion.

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

The Chair: Now let's go to the speaking order that Mr. Warawa proposed earlier, if you want to put it back on the table.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Yes.

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

● (0940)

The Chair: Okay. Any discussion on that? No?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Okay, notice of motions.

Mr. McGuinty.

Mr. David McGuinty: May I just raise one more question with respect to witnesses' statements and questioning? I think it would speak to Ms. Duncan's concerns.

My experience is that occasionally our committees overbook witnesses. It gets to the point where, if we have five or six intervenors or four to seven people at a table, it becomes very difficult to have a meaningful exchange. I would also, I think, speak to the chances of having a third round, a full round, which would give Ms. Duncan and other members of the committee the chance to ask questions.

I don't know whether we should cap it, but I just wanted to raise it with everyone, because I think three witnesses at thirty minutes, or a maximum of four witnesses at forty minutes, is enough substance for us to chew on in a two-hour meeting, with the right questions and answers, for us to really get to some tough and important questions.

Sometimes we're so rushed and sometimes there are so many intervenors here that I feel bad for the witnesses, some of whom come down, or fly in, and have six or seven minutes, or they're sharing a presentation. I don't think it's respectful of their time either. I'm wondering if we can, as a kind of rule of thumb, say we can hold ourselves to maybe three witnesses, three solid witnesses. They may bring people accompanying them to answer questions, I don't know, but that's 30 to 35 minutes, you know, with your leeway and your discretion. If someone's in their eleventh minute, I don't know how you intend to proceed, but I don't think...you know, you will cut them off. But if it's 33 minutes, and with three intervenors, three witnesses, it gives us more time to have a more meaningful dialogue.

It's just a suggestion to consider.

The Chair: No, and I agree a hundred percent, because we've had similar problems in other committees.

I've got Mr. Calkins, then Monsieur Bigras, and then Mr. Watson.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I would just like to actually support Mr. McGuinty's proposal here. If you do the math, the first and second round take up 63 minutes, and an additional first round takes up another 28 minutes, for a total of 91 minutes. If we have three presenters, at ten minutes apiece, that's another thirty minutes. That basically puts us precisely on the two-hour limit.

However, Mr. Chair, I wouldn't want to handcuff you, at your discretion, to make sure presenters have an opportunity to come and present before the committee. But if that were a rule of thumb or a guiding benchmark that we can use for the committee, I think that would work out very well, plus it would address Ms. Duncan's concern about not getting a second question in from the New Democratic Party.

The Chair: Monsieur Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I understand the principle and the spirit of Mr. McGuinty's proposal, however, on occasion—and it's no secret—it happens that some witnesses are more relevant than others and we want to spend more time with them. It seems to me that we have created a Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure to assess which witnesses we should call. We will discuss future business, but I think that the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure should look at this issue of witnesses when it sets the agenda. From experience, I know that we want to spend more time with some witnesses than with others. Some witnesses do PowerPoint presentations without that necessarily adding any value. I understand Mr. McGuinty's proposal and I think this should go to the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll comment on that. I think if there is somebody we want to have a bigger presentation from, then we just have a special meeting for that one particular witness or group, but I think we still want a rule of thumb that we do not have more than 30 minutes of testimony before we break into questioning.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: I just wanted to clarify. I think Mr. McGuinty is hinting at the number of presentations, not witnesses. Some organizations may want to have two or three people with them at the table, only one of whom will be presenting.

• (0945)

The Chair: Right. They can present, and they can split up their time as they see fit.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Fair enough. So it's the number of presentations we're limiting.

The Chair: Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: I think this is a really good discussion.

Thank you, Mr. McGuinty, for your suggestion of clarification, because often we've tried to squeeze in too many witnesses. If a witness or a witness group has ten minutes, it's not uncommon for it to use less than that. So if the chair had discretion to give another

witness a little bit more time so that we would still use up the maximum thirty minutes, that would be a very good idea.

Thank you to Mr. Bigras for his suggestions too.

The Chair: Definitely we want to do our work as a committee and have a very in-depth discussion with witnesses. The more we crowd at that end of the table, the more difficult our work gets, and then we're just going to frustrate witnesses and not really add quality to the reports we're working on.

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I think it's an excellent suggestion, so long as the process for deciding which witnesses to have is a little fairer than the way we just allocated time to all the parties.

The Chair: You'll be on the subcommittee, Ms. Duncan, and that's where we'll decide on which witnesses are coming in. I'd rather add meetings than try to crowd up at the end of the table. That's a cordial agreement among members.

Let's move on to notice of motions. In the last session of Parliament the agreement was that a full 24 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 prior to 6 p.m. and distributed to members in both official languages.

Are there any comments?

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Chair, in the last Parliament they found the 24 hours a little bit tight. The spirit of this, whether the government is tabling a motion or the opposition is tabling a motion, is that others at committee have a fair amount of time to deal with and research and consider what is being tabled. So I think that 48 hours would be a little bit fairer for both sides. I'm proposing to change it from 24 hours to 48 hours: that 48 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee; that the motion shall be filed and distributed to the members by the clerk in both official languages; that notice be deemed given when the motion is received.... That's another important point. When does the clock start ticking? It's when the motion is received by the clerk. Also, what does 48 hours mean? Twenty-four hours could be considered one sleep, and 48 hours is two sleeps. I'm suggesting that 48 hours be defined as 48 hours.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask the clerk to enlighten us on what the normal practice is in other committees. Does it vary much, or has it converged on a set norm?

The Chair: Mr. Radford.

The Clerk: The practice ranges from 24 hours to 48 hours, so there's no real consistency.

The Chair: Monsieur Bigras.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I find the parliamentary secretary's argument somewhat funny and paradoxical, because he has a whole battery of public officials to look at their motions. We are being told that this leaves us little time to assess the significance of motions. If the opposition is able to do this, I don't see why the government would not have the time and the means to do so.

I think that this rule has generally worked well in the past, unless my opposition colleagues contradict me. So I fail to understand Mr. Warawa's argument. Perhaps he could explain it to us. He has at his disposal a whole battery of public servants and advisors. Time is not the strongest argument in favour of the motion he is making.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Warawa.

• (0950)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you. I think the idea is to have fairness for both sides. If the government were to table a substantive motion with 24 hours' notice defined as one sleep, we could provide something to the clerk and not give the opposition a fair amount of time to consider what that motion meant. So both sides need to have adequate time.

Your point is well taken. The government may have an advantage, with more resources to consider that. So this is a motion that applies to both opposition and government. Both need to have a fair amount of time. What is that? I suggest that the clock start as soon as the clerk receives it. I think that has to be clarified. What does 24 hours or 48 hours mean? I suggest it's 48 hours from when the clerk receives the motion. I think that would provide fairness for both sides.

The Chair: Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you.

I think Mr. Bigras made a good point, that the government has all these resources at its disposal to analyze and parse motions rather quickly. As far as the opposition is concerned, we feel that 24 hours is enough, bearing in mind that we don't meet every day or every second day anyway. Sometimes 24 hours becomes de facto 48 hours, 72 hours, or whatever. I'm comfortable with 24 hours.

The Chair: Monsieur Ouellet.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: What concerns me is the 48 hours straight. In other words, if a motion is tabled at 6 p.m. on Monday evening, it cannot be studied the next day or even on the Wednesday. So that means a two-day delay. Furthermore, if the motion is tabled on Tuesday evening, it cannot be considered until the following week because of when the committee sits, meaning Tuesday and Thursday mornings, so two days apart. This brings us to the following week. That is too long. This means that a motion tabled at the beginning or the middle of the week can only be considered the following week, and events may have changed. So I think that 24 hours' notice is more realistic, to ensure timeliness and relevancy.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am new to this committee—and as my friend across said, new to any committee—so I couch my remarks somewhat cautiously. I don't know what matters this committee might deal with that would involve such great emergency or urgency that they must be decided within 24 hours. There may be some, but I expect that most of the matters we deal with would involve matters of such importance that we would want to give them good consideration.

I suppose I am also learning that this committee may not be what I thought it was. I thought I came here as a committee member with an independent responsibility to investigate and make up my own mind about things. I must confess, having been a lawyer for 30 years, there are very few issues of any importance that I could investigate and make up my mind about within 24 hours. While the government may have resources, I do want to bring some of my own independent reasoning to things.

If those things we deal with here are important, then I think they're important enough to justify 48 hours' notice at least.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any further questions?

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Perhaps we could reach a compromise position here. Mr. Ouellet provided basically a worst-case scenario, with it being very long. The other worst-case scenario is that it would be too short.

I'd suggest that if we are meeting on Tuesday, as we are today, that if a 24-hour notice period, one sleep, is what we were to use and it wasn't clear when the clock started ticking.... It could be received by the clerk in his slot, so the clerk didn't actually receive it. I think that's an important point that has to be clarified. If the motion was slid under the clerk's door at six or seven o'clock on a Monday night and we meet on Tuesday, it would then meet the one-sleep requirement, that 24 hours.

I can live with 24 hours, if it's 24 hours. That would give us, as committee members, an opportunity to receive and consider it. If we are meeting on Tuesday morning at nine, it would have to be received by the clerk by nine the previous day, which would be Monday morning at nine. If 24 hours is 24 hours, and it starts from when the clerk receives it, then we could live with 24 hours.

• (0955)

The Chair: Essentially that's what the motion adopted by committee in the past says. It is a full 24 hours' notice. It's not one sleep; it's a full 24-hour time clock. Okay?

So we're back to the original motion.

Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Chair, thank you.

For my own understanding as well, I wonder if it might be helpful to define what we mean by “received by the clerk.”

The Chair: Mr. Radford.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Perhaps the clerk should explain what this motion means. That would resolve many issues.

[*English*]

The Clerk: It means it's sent to me, for example, by e-mail, and I actually have it. I can see it. Sometimes members—well, all of us—send documents by e-mail, but we inadvertently send it to the wrong address. You could have a member who says it was sent to me last night, but if I didn't receive it then I don't have it. It's when I actually have it and I can see the document in front of me, whether it's by e-mail or a piece of paper or mail. Mail is important too. It takes about 24 hours in this Parliament to physically send a document. If your staff send it to me by mail and it's four o'clock, I won't get it until the next day—perhaps at ten or maybe a bit later. Now, in your mind you've sent it to me and given your 24 hours' notice, but I have not seen it. I have not read it. I have not had a chance to see if it's in order. Sometimes there are things we need to adjust or correct.

So it's when I receive it—when I actually look at it.

The Chair: And you have a way of verifying it.

The Clerk: Yes, I can verify it. I can phone your caucus and ask, “Do you really want to do this? There seems to be a contradiction”, or whatever.

Mr. Peter Braid: There is a confirmation of receipt by yourself.

The Clerk: Yes, a confirmation or receipt.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: With respect to clarification of language, the motion is that the motion be “filed with the clerk”. We may forget what that means down the road or we may have a change of personnel around this table. Should that be changed to “received by the clerk”?

The Chair: Then the question becomes why we have the 6 p.m. time limit in here.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I suggest to my committee colleagues that the motion should be worded something to the effect that “the clerk acknowledges receipt of a motion”. Once that acknowledgement is made, whether it's sitting in an in-box....

For example, a committee member, through their staff, could submit a motion while we're actually sitting in committee right now. If hypothetically we were in the 48-hours scenario, does that qualify for the Thursday meeting, given that we're already past nine o'clock on Tuesday? The clerk wouldn't have a chance to read the e-mail until he returned to his office.

I think we really should be looking at when the clerk actually acknowledges receipt or confirmation of the notice of the motion. I think at that point in time, once that acknowledgement is made, the 24-hour clock starts ticking.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I understand the principle raised by Mr. Calkins, but I think that it's not a standard rule. To ensure that the clerk's office can operate properly, standards must be established. I don't know whether the clerk can tell us which rule applies, that of acknowledging receipt or that regarding the tabling of the motion. We need to try to establish standard rules because the clerk also has help. Standard operating procedures need to be established to help facilitate the work of the clerk. We can debate the issue of having 24 or 48 hours' notice, but I am not sure whether discussing the tabling or the acknowledgment of receipt will facilitate the work of the clerk or that of the committee.

In the past, have we adopted a rule regarding acknowledgment of receipt by the clerk?

● (1000)

The Clerk: Typically, when I receive an amendment, I call the member or the MP's office or I confirm by e-mail. It's simply a courtesy.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: With regard to the routine motions adopted by the committees...

The Clerk: The motions that were passed are the ones you have before you. The word used in English is “filed”, and in French, it is “*déposée*”. Earlier, I said that if a member sends a paper document from his or her office by messenger, there is no way for me to get that document before the next day. The member may say that it was sent the day before at 4 p.m. When I actually have the document in hand, it is clear.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: When you call, that is considered an acknowledgment of receipt.

The Clerk: Yes, it is an acknowledgment of receipt.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have Mr. Scarpaleggia, and then Mr. McGuinty.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Chair, could we not require that all notices of motion be sent by e-mail? Everyone has access to the Internet in this day and age. If the motion arrives after 5:30 p.m. or 6 p.m. on Friday, it would be deemed to have been received at 8 a.m. on Monday morning. That gives us more than 24 hours, because we meet on Tuesdays at 9 a.m.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. McGuinty, and then Ms. Duncan.

Mr. David McGuinty: I think serving notice to the clerk electronically by e-mail should be clocked by time of receipt of the e-mail in the inbox of the clerk. If the clerk is not well one day or is delayed or has a staff colleague who doesn't get it, it puts the clerk in a difficult situation. The clerk has an objective metric, which is called the clock and the time of receipt of e-mail with notice of motion in his inbox. I think that constitutes the beginning of the ticking of 24 hours of time. It's very clean. There are no challenges on that front. We all have proof of sending time, but more importantly, the clerk has proof of receipt time. Getting the clerk into a situation of having to say, "Well, I got to work at nine o'clock but I didn't get around to sending acknowledgement out until 10:30, because I was called to an urgent meeting".... It puts the clerk in a tough spot.

I think the time of receipt of the e-mail in the clerk's inbox ought to be the time at which the 24 hours start ticking.

The Chair: I have Ms. Duncan, then Mr. Trudeau, and Mr. Calkins.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, along the lines of the issue Mr. Bigras raised, I'm concerned that we're trying to reinvent the wheel.

The finance committee apparently have already approved all of their rules and they're on to the substance, which I would like us to move on to. They came up with a compromise of 36 hours, and they aren't getting into the detail of whether the clerk has the flu and blah, blah, blah. Their rule is that 36 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee unless the substantive motion relates directly to the 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.

I suggest we just keep it clean and simple and not get into all kinds of combinations and permutations.

The Chair: So you're moving an amendment to 36 hours? Or is it a friendly amendment?

Ms. Linda Duncan: I guess it's a friendly amendment just to cut through all of this detail that seems unnecessary to me.

The Chair: Do you accept that as a friendly amendment, the 36-hour notice?

Mr. Mark Warawa: Well, I think it provides for interesting discussion, but we need to have consensus around the table, and I don't think we have that.

The Chair: Okay.

I have Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: I thought we just had more or less a consensus on 24 hours. I appreciate, maybe, that adding the words "electronically received" is appropriate for an environmental committee trying to stay away from paper, but more than that, I don't think we need to get into the details. I think the wording is....

•(1005)

The Chair: I have Monsieur Bigras and then Mr. Warawa.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I agree completely with what Mr. Trudeau said.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: My question is to Ms. Duncan and is about the 36 hours. The concern I have is that every member here have an opportunity to consider what is going to be discussed around this table. Every opinion is very important, as has been brought to our attention. So if the clerk receives a substantive motion and may have to translate it into both official languages and then have it disseminated to every member of this committee, when do we get it? When does the clock start? It gets very confusing. Your suggestion of 36 hours may avoid some of that confusion. I think it's an interesting compromise, and I would be willing to accept it.

The Chair: Mr. Bigras.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: In the past, did the 24-hour rule mean that motions did not get translated, Mr. Clerk? No? So it was possible to follow the rules nonetheless, and therefore Mr. Warawa's argument does not stand up.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, so the motion on the floor from Mr. Warawa is on the 48 hours. He's accepting a friendly amendment from Ms. Duncan to make it 36 hours.

Go ahead, Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Just to be sure, I thought it was 36 hours for substantive motions only. I want to be sure about what we're actually talking about, not that it's just—

The Chair: No, we're talking about substantive motions.

Mr. Jeff Watson: —36 hours for everything. Or is it 36 hours for substantive motions only?

The Chair: It is for substantive motions.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Are there any further comments? Seeing none, I'm going to call the question, and I'll just read this one more time. Or do you want to read it, Mark?

Mr. Mark Warawa: Bear with me for a second, Chair.

The Chair: I'll read it the way I interpreted it based on the discussion we had, because I want to actually incorporate what Mr. Trudeau said about electronic, if that's okay with the committee.

Mr. Mark Warawa: It's fine.

The Chair: So it's that a full 36 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 electronically received by the clerk of the committee and distributed to members in both official languages.

Agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Are we okay with that wording?

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I do not agree.

[English]

The Chair: I call the vote.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: We'll go on to a reduced quorum.

What was passed last time was that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence when a quorum is not present and to have that evidence printed, provided that at least three members are present, including one member of the opposition.

We'll have Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: I would like to make an amendment to “including one member of the opposition” by adding “and one member from the government other than the chair”.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Bigras.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: The amendment put forward by the government could block the work of committees. We have to remember that often we have witnesses coming from outside Ottawa, and significant costs are involved. Sometimes witnesses actually come from the most westerly provinces.

What the government is suggesting would involve running the risk of incurring expenses for travel by witnesses, because if there is no opposition or government member present, and there is no quorum, the meeting could not be held. I think this is a danger. During the last session, we passed a rule that worked well. We must facilitate the committee's work. I would move rather that we stick to the rule we passed before.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: I appreciate Mr. Bigras' concern, but in what we've seen over the last two Parliaments, his example has never happened. There have been examples where a committee's agenda was changed, even as we had witnesses sitting here to speak, but it was never changed by the government.

That's in the past. His example has never happened.

In the spirit of fairness, this committee will only work if everybody is willing to make it work. If anybody wants to disrupt this and cause a problem, that will happen. There has to be willingness on everybody's part to make it work.

The government is committed to being part of this. If the committee can only function.... In fairness, we have to make sure the opposition members are here. The government can't do their own thing. That's why it's in there, that the opposition has to be there. For clarification, the government should also be there. That's why I'm adding that—again in the spirit of clarify and fairness.

• (1010)

The Chair: Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I concur with the comments of Mr. Bigras. It's my understanding—contrary to what Mr. Warawa is saying, and that may be the case of this committee—there was an instance last year with a witness who came all the way from Alberta and was not heard.

I do not agree with changing the rule. I think the opposite result will occur, and this rule is written precisely to avoid that kind of scenario.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: I have a question for the clerk. What is the rationale for not having the government listed in this motion? Is it the norm to have the government listed, or is it deemed that the government would be there anyway?

The Clerk: The purpose of this motion is to ensure that when you don't have your full quorum, the chair can receive evidence. The chair in this instance is from the government. The committee cannot make any decisions. It cannot change agendas. All it can do is receive evidence. It's to ensure that if we have someone travelling from out west or from the east, we can receive evidence.

Members are also entitled to have substitutes at meetings.

The Chair: Just for clarification, the chair would have to be me in this case; it wouldn't be the vice-chair.

The Clerk: I believe we encountered that problem last year where we had a vice-chair in the chair. So in theory you could have a situation where you would have only opposition members.

Mr. Mark Warawa: That was my question too. To say that the committee could function without the government doesn't make sense. So to hear witnesses.... No decision could be made with a reduced quorum. You need to have the government and the opposition. It's important that we have that, and I would make that an amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Radford was just explaining to me that if I were not to be at that meeting, I'd have to agree that the vice-chair could take the chair. The vice-chair can't take the chair in a reduced quorum without the chair's approval.

Mr. Bigras.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I do not understand the government's argument. I could understand it if it came from the NDP, which has only one member on this committee, but the government has five members at the table. So I think they should be able to get at least one here. I think it is a question of respect for our witnesses.

When witnesses from British Columbia come to Ottawa, there is a cost to the committee. At the very least, we should be able to hear them. It is a question of respect not only toward witnesses, but also toward taxpayers. Clearly, the government should at least maintain the current rule, at the very least. The government is trying to save money in every possible way and has a very high accountability requirement. The motion is in keeping with this approach, and demonstrates respect for both taxpayers and witnesses.

[English]

The Chair: I have Mr. Ouellet, and then Francis.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Chair, I think the argument that there must be a government member could be quite biased. We tried this in a different committee during the last Parliament. The way in which the amendment is worded means that if two witnesses are chosen by the committee or by a party, and, at the last minute, the government realizes that they are not favourable to its position, the government members on the committee may simply not attend the meeting. Consequently, it would be impossible to hear from the witnesses. This makes no sense. It could be a way of boycotting certain witnesses. I think that is unacceptable.

• (1015)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Scarpaleggia and Mr. Trudeau.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If the government side has agreed that the committee should invite one or more witnesses, I think it only makes sense that the government members be required to take part in the meeting. If the government side is absolutely opposed to inviting a witness, it has the option of filibustering, even in a minority situation. There are options open to the government side. In any case, when we decide to invite witnesses, this is normally done with the approval of the government side. If all of a sudden the government side were to decide to overturn the decisions that have been made and to boycott the committee, then I think there would be a lack of good faith. I would not expect such a thing from my colleagues on the other side.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Trudeau, Mr. Warawa, and then Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: I'm just concerned with the possibility of blocking or not hearing witnesses. The reality is, we all want to get along and we all want to work well. We want to see committees function, but there have been times when that hasn't been able to happen. I think putting in a rule that allows for the government to block the hearing of witnesses—not the functioning of committees, but the hearing of witnesses—is dangerous.

Hopefully it will never be necessary, and this committee is going to work well, everyone is going to get along, and this will be a useless discussion. But I'm wary of giving an extra edge to a government that has, in the past, shown poor faith in that regard.

The Chair: Mr. Warawa, then Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you.

This is an interesting discussion. Mr. Trudeau just mentioned a history of the government blocking listening to the witnesses. In fact, Chair, that has not happened. It has been the other way around, where the opposition has tried to block the hearing.

As I said about five minutes ago, we had witnesses lined up and sitting in their chairs, and it was the opposition that said we are changing the agenda and we are not going to hear from the

witnesses; we have a new agenda. That was the 39th Parliament. That's behind us. Hopefully it doesn't happen.

The fingers are being pointed at the government as the body that would possibly be creating the problem. I think the argument can go both ways. Hopefully that was in the past, and hopefully we can work together. I think there is agreement around this table that witnesses, when they are invited, should be heard, and that the government and opposition should not object to hearing from the witnesses. It should go both ways. I'm assuming that we're starting off with goodwill and that the rules apply both to opposition members and to the government side.

Now what we have before us in this motion is a clarification at the end: "including one member of the opposition". If that were struck and it read "that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, providing at least three members are present", period, that would deal with the concern that's been expressed. The rules apply for both sides, so the witnesses can be heard, providing there are three members here. We are then in a position of trust to one another.

So I would then move that the last phrase, "including one member of the opposition", be struck, and we can move on.

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

Mr. Warawa has stolen my thunder. It is precisely the point I was going to make: what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If our friends opposite are concerned about us boycotting the committee, I'm sure they will well understand that we might be concerned about them boycotting the committee. Alternatively, if in fact we want to have equity, then both government and opposition should be present, or I agree with Mr. Warawa's suggestion to strike the requirement for an opposition member.

• (1020)

The Chair: What we have on the table is a motion reading that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three members are present.

Monsieur Bigras.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I understand. We had a discussion on an amendment. Now a favourable amendment has been put forward, but there is no debate. We are voting immediately on this amendment. Is that in fact what you are telling us? Can we acknowledge the fact that Mr. Warawa's amendment has just been amended, and that there should be a discussion on it?

[English]

The Chair: I believe we're trying to work in the spirit of consensus and cooperation at the table, and Mr. Warawa is amending his own motion, saying we should take into consideration the concern that's been expressed by the opposition to make—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I understand very well, Mr. Chair, but we reached consensus on the basis of a discussion. In the government's new motion, we must take into account the fact that inevitably, the chair is the person who calls the meeting. I do not know what the other members of the official opposition think about this new amendment, which amounts to putting a period after the word "present" and eliminating the words "including one member of the opposition". I would like to have a discussion on this point.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Trudeau is first, then it will be Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: We are absolutely opposed to the idea that even in theory the chair could call witnesses and bring three members of the government side to hear the witness and have the proceedings recorded as official evidence without any of the official opposition being there. That is, I think, against the spirit of our parliamentary system.

To say that one member of the opposition should be present is different from saying that everybody should have someone there. There is a role for the official opposition—or for the opposition, not even “official” opposition—to be present when a witness is being heard.

I think the motion should stand as is and that it's a mistake to amend it.

The Chair: Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I would add to that by saying in response to Mr. Woodworth's point that we have an asymmetrical situation here. I don't think we can say that what's good for the goose should be good for the gander. We have a party that is in a minority position and therefore might have an incentive to block the work of the committee by not showing up. The opposition typically would not have the incentive to try to block the work of the committee, because we have a majority, and chances are that we would have agreed to bring in certain witnesses.

I think we should take away this ability to upend the committee through absenteeism.

The Chair: I have Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I guess we're now back to some discussion saying that if we're going to apply the check on the possibility of three members being from one party, then the equal and opposite check should be in place. We should be specifying that one government member be present, if they're going to specify that one opposition member is part of this as well.

Some of the history from this Parliament at its first convening may point the finger at the government; there was plenty of “gotcha” from the other side. If we're going to start establishing stipulations that are checks, then they should be equal. Then we're probably back to the discussion that if this is to include one member of the opposition, it should also include one member of the government.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Warawa, and then to Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Mark Warawa: This is quite an interesting discussion. I thought this was quite obvious; obviously not.

Mr. Trudeau made a comment that there is a role for the opposition to be present. I would agree with that. But I would also agree, or think it would be fair, that there is a role for the government to be here.

Now, the majority of the time in the history of Parliament, you have had majority governments. Minority governments have been in the minority. To protect opposition members at committee, this clause was put in there so that the government couldn't run roughshod and do its own thing. Before you could hear from witnesses, you had to have members of the opposition there.

That's the logic for this to be in there. And it's good. It provides fairness. It provides protection that the government can't do just whatever it wants. You have to have opposition members there.

In the 38th Parliament and the 39th Parliament, and now this Parliament, they've been minority Parliaments. Reverse logic needs to play. In a traditional Parliament, there are more members on the government side than on the opposition side. In a minority, it's the opposite.

We found in the last Parliament a description of the tyranny of the minority, or the tyranny of the opposition. With seven members on that side and four members on this side, there was very little left for the government to do to protect our democratic rights to be involved with the procedure at committee.

That's why the logic is that the government has to be there. With more members on that side, seven against four in the last Parliament, for things to run properly and to give the government an opportunity to present their case and their opinion, you had to have us there at the meeting. The logic there needed to be that you have a member of the government at those meetings. Otherwise, the opposition, who had more members, could run roughshod over them.

In the last Parliament, we also saw—this will be the third time reminding the members here—that when witnesses were ignored and dismissed, that did not happen from the government; it happened with the agenda of the opposition, at the last. We have a new Parliament, so again, let's push that behind us. But it happened. All the examples of witnesses not being heard were due to the decisions of the opposition, not the government.

I think the rules of fairness have to apply for both sides. In this Parliament, we have approximately 50-50. We have six members of the opposition and five members, so it's pretty close. For this committee to function in a spirit of trust and fairness, we have to all be willing to work together. There is a role for the opposition, yes, but to insinuate that there's not a role for the government defies logic. There must be a role for the government to play in here.

If we're laying out the rules that we all need to respect and move on from and use as our framework, if there has to be opposition members here, then we must assume that there has to be government members here. If, in an approximate 50-50 makeup, you're going to list the opposition, you have to list the government. If you're not going to list the opposition, then you don't have to list the government.

So in the spirit of fairness, it has to be one way or another. If you list opposition, you must list government. If you're not going to list one side, then you don't have to list the other. Either way, whether I amend it by including the government or I amend it by having nobody, we have to have a spirit of fairness and logic.

•(1025)

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth, and then Mr. McGuinty.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, before I came to this meeting this morning, I resolved that I would live by the maxim that it's better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open my mouth and confirm all suspicions. I find myself speaking a little more than I had intended, so please forgive me my lack of experience.

Especially with timidity, I wish to take some small issue with Mr. Scarpaleggia as to the question of who has an incentive to boycott a meeting and who does not. I haven't been here long enough to know, but I can imagine a situation in which there might be witnesses appearing who might be favourable to a government position, and the opposition might have incentive to boycott.

I think the chair can question witnesses, but it's my view that the chair's role is best fulfilled by not descending into the arena, and that we would be well advised to allow for government questioning other than by the chair. That would make committees run more fairly, in my opinion.

However, I'd like to bring us back to the noble spirit with which this discussion began, which is our intention that when witnesses travel from a distance they not be left unheard. Truly, if that's the noble intention we're trying to achieve here, then we ought to remove any possibility of witnesses not being heard by reason of boycott, by either the opposition or the government. If our intention is that witnesses be heard, then let's get rid of this whole opportunity for game playing and just take that sentence out.

Thank you.

•(1030)

The Chair: Mr. McGuinty.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Chair, I have one quick sentence. I can't imagine a scenario in which the government, which now has up to five full members on the committee, would not have a member present unless they chose not to be present.

Secondly, I'd like to call the vote, if we could, on this motion.

The Chair: Okay. The vote is called.

A voice: On what?

The Chair: Yes, exactly—on what? The motion we have, I believe, is the one that was moved by Mr. Warawa and amended, which includes one member of the opposition and one member of the government. That is what we are discussing, so that would be the motion Mr. McGuinty is asking for a vote on. I believe we have had a very full debate.

Mr. David McGuinty: Could you read it, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: I'll read it:

That the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the government.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: So where do we go from here?

Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Chair, would you accept a motion to put the alternative version forward—that is, the same paragraph but without the requirement of the attendance of an opposition member?

The Chair: So that would end at “three members are present”, period. That's the motion on the table.

Is there any debate?

(Motion negated)

The Chair: So where are we now?

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Chair, the only other option, again in the spirit of fairness, would be to change.... I'll be moving an amendment.

The Chair: Now you're moving a motion. There is no amendment.

Mr. Mark Warawa: We have a motion on the table, and it's been—

The Chair: We have the one, which is on the original reduced quorum, which came from the 39th Parliament, second session.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Correct, and I'm going to be moving an amendment to that.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mark Warawa: It would say “including one member of each party”. That's the only other option. There would be a requirement and we'd have to change it to four, which would mean you'd have to have a member of the NDP, a member of the Bloc, a member of the Liberals, and a member of the Conservatives.

The Chair: So we're saying that four members would be present, including one member from each party. Is that the motion then?

Mr. Mark Warawa: That's excluding the chair, so there would actually be a total of five, including you.

The Chair: So any party can shut down a meeting then.

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Anything less than this, Chair, will not work. I think we will hit a roadblock. If we're saying the only way this will proceed is if you have opposition members and you don't need government, that really greatly concerns me. I believe we're stepping away from fairness. This is the only compromise. With anything less than this, this committee is, I think, at a stalemate.

The Chair: Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, I have two points on that.

I know that you may have the best of intentions, Mr. Warawa, but there's a little bit of hypocrisy here. You're fighting for my right to sit in my chair, but not my right to speak. Given the vote on the very first motion of the day, I really don't see it. I'm not given much opportunity to say anything anyway, so the fact I can show up isn't much encouragement.

It's my understanding that these amendments are coming forward to every committee. The finance committee have already passed their motions. They are keeping the matter of quorum exactly as it is now.

Given that, I don't really see any reason for us to be reinventing the rules for this particular committee.

•(1035)

The Chair: Okay. Are there any other questions or comments?

Mr. Woodworth, and then Mr. McGuinty.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: The way I see it, Mr. Chair, is that the NDP member is perhaps selling herself a little short, in that what we are now discussing would put all parties, including the NDP, in a position of equality with respect to the issue of boycotting or other matters that might occur. I think the earlier discussion still would allow the NDP member an opportunity to question. In fact if we were operating with a reduced quorum, the NDP member would almost certainly have at least two or three shots at questioning, because of the fact there's a reduced quorum. That might well work to the advantage of the NDP.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. McGuinty.

Mr. David McGuinty: It's come to our attention in the official opposition that most of these changes are being proposed in every standing committee, Mr. Chair, by the government. Hats off to the government for being that organized. Congratulations.

I think our position here is that the motion as worded is sufficient. It is clear. If there are any fears to be allayed over time, I don't think we're bound by these. They can be revisited over time, Mr. Chair. If in three months' time, six months' time, or a year's time we find, or the government finds, the parliamentary secretary finds, or the government's whip's office finds that these are not working, these can be revisited at this committee.

I would implore that we move on here so that we can get down to substantive business. We would be supporting the reduced quorum motion as worded from the 39th Parliament. We arrived at that through practice. It seemed to work fine for a good balance of the 39th Parliament, and I've not heard anything yet to convince me as one member that this needs to be revisited.

I would suggest that we go back if we can—if I'm able to do this—and call the vote on the existing motion, so we can move on and get down to substantive business.

The Chair: I still have speakers on the list for this motion, so I can't take the call.

Mr. Watson and Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Some of us would like to speak to it, so you can relax for a minute.

Today's exercise is obviously extremely important, as we're laying the ground rules for the way this committee is going to be operating from here on out.

To Ms. Duncan, the committees are masters of their own destinies. This isn't patterned bargaining, where whatever is applied in one committee applies to all committees. It's not like the House, where the Standing Orders bind all members equally. There is room for departure from the practice of other committees, as long as it's within the Standing Orders of the House. So the fact that we're discussing something that may be different from the finance committee, or different from the status of women committee, or different from the public accounts committee—and I've been on several committees already, which all operate with different nuances—it's certainly within the purview of the committee to determine what rules it would like to have. So while we appreciate the guidance in terms of the discussion here, we can have room for nuance and departure.

What seems to be happening here for some of us who have been on the committee in previous Parliaments—and for me, that extends all the way back to when the Liberals were the government—is that, obviously, the ground rules for debate at this committee have an unfortunate context, in that we've had a tremendous amount of... I should say that goodwill was poisoned a long time ago. I think we could apportion blame, but I think both sides have some element in that. Climbing down from that context, for those who have been here a bit longer, is going to require movement on both sides.

In an instance like this one, I would suggest... I obviously thought that the prior way of handling this, where the check was applied equally to both sides, was the most equitable way of doing this. Of the alternatives that are left, I think this one is now the most equitable way to ensure there's a proper check from both sides.

I wish we didn't have the unfortunate context of the last two Parliaments. We do have some of that, and I think it's vitally important that we get this particular one right.

I will be supporting the motion for that, as it's the best of the two alternatives left. I would certainly hope that members on the opposite side will grant the reasonable check in both directions.

•(1040)

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McGuinty's idea that we could leave this to be resolved at a future date is an interesting one, but it reminds me of an old maxim: that hard cases make bad law. It seems to me the worst time to try to come up with a new rule is when we encounter difficulties. That's when the opportunity to make a good rule is reduced. It's a little like starting out in a marriage knowing that you're not in agreement, and saying we'll wait until we're married a few years and then figure it out. It would be far better if we could get this right at the outset.

I'm surprised that we've moved so far from the original sentiment, which was that we want to make sure that all witnesses get heard. If we maintain that sentiment, then surely we ought to all be in the soup together, one way or the other.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Checks and balances are essential in committee work, in this committee. The focus is that we hear witnesses.

It's been on the books that yes, the opposition has the capacity to block by not showing up. That's the issue the government side seems to have on this. That's what's been on the books. That's our check.

Your check, actually, is sitting as the chair. We cannot hear witnesses unless the chair agrees or the chair agrees to pass on his responsibility to the vice-chair. That's your check.

The proposal the government is putting forward right now is actually asking for permission to give the government the capacity to block witnesses' statements. That's what this amendment is all about.

You're complaining that "you guys on the other side have the capacity to block, so we should have the capacity to block as well".

It may seem uneven from where you're sitting, but the opposition has the role that it has, and you have the chair that you have. Now let's vote once again on this motion.

The Chair: Mr. Calkins, and then Ms. Duncan.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Actually, I'm not so sure that the intention on my part is that one side can block the other. I think what this really comes down to is that when the committee is hearing testimony from a witness pertaining to a bill or a study, at some point in time that report or that bill will come up for votes. And I think it's incumbent that at least one person from either side of the table has the opportunity to attend every meeting so that we can get it right so the testimony that was heard at that reduced-quorum meeting can be accurately reflected, discussed, and debated.

I couldn't imagine simply relying on the Hansard statements to capture the entire nuance of a witness's testimony. There are lots of other things that need to be taken into consideration when a witness is here. For example, if there are any visual aids, those things aren't captured; if there are any nuances in tone or context, those things aren't captured either.

From my perspective, I think it would be handy to have at least one opposition member present and one member from the governing party present, so that when that testimony is heard, even if it is in a reduced quorum, the entirety of it can be discussed. We often meet as a group to discuss whether or not the testimony is accurately reflected in the blues or in the Hansard, whether it is accurately reflected or captured in a report, or in an amendment to a bill. And I think it's particularly unfair to either side, frankly, that the testimony could be given, could be heard, could be recorded without the presence of at least one member from either side of this table.

• (1045)

The Chair: Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, am I correct in saying that the existing rule is the one that's on the table and we are debating?

The Chair: Actually, no. What was just proposed is that there be one member from each party. I believe that is what Mr. Warawa put on the table.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Can we just call the question, please?

The Chair: As long as I don't have anybody else on this.

I have Mr. Warawa and Mr. Woodworth speaking on this.

On a point of order, Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: On a point of order.

I would like to know whether the motion just introduced is in order, since it restates one that has already been passed.

[*English*]

The Chair: No, the amended motion that has been presented by Mr. Warawa is different from the one that we just previously defeated, since it's now calling for a member from each party to be present when hearing witnesses. That is significantly different from what it was before, and I'm ruling the motion in order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I am not sure of that.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's in order.

Next I have Mr. Woodworth, and then Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

I have a question for the clerk, actually. It's stemming from my own lack of knowledge of some of these procedures.

In most committees and organizations that I belong to, the members of the committee can invoke a meeting, and in most committees or organizations that I belong to, the vice-chair can take over simply when the chair is not present. If those rules apply here, then Mr. Trudeau's comments about the government necessarily being chair may not be entirely to the point.

In other words, I'm asking, can a meeting of this committee occur where, by reason of the absence of the chair, the vice-chair is in the seat?

Thank you.

The Chair: For your information, Mr. Woodworth, only the chair can call the meeting. So if I decided to call a meeting and then vacate that role and subjugate it to the vice-chair, that would be my position, but first I would have to call the meeting. Only the chair can call the meeting.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: If the meeting were called and you as chair were for some reason unable to attend, what would happen?

The Chair: Then the vice-chair would take over, if I agreed to it, or I have the option to cancel the meeting.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Warawa. Hopefully this is the final comment.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Chair, I don't want to repeat myself, but the logic of the clause that was in the original motion was from a majority government perspective, that you need to have the opportunity to have the opposition present so the majority government does not run roughshod over Parliament.

Of course, that was turned down. What was good for the goose is not good for the gander, apparently. So in the spirit of fairness, to protect the interests of the government and Canadians, we want to make sure that we are staying on track. The opposition did not want to have it applied fairly on both sides, so that's why the amending motion is that it would require a member from the NDP, a member from the Bloc, and from the Liberals and the government. Every member would have to be there.

I'm okay with calling that question in a moment, and hopefully it's supported here, because the other two amending motions were not. So I'm okay with calling the question at this time.

The Chair: Are there any further comments?

Monsieur Ouellet.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Warawa's argument is not correct, because he is speaking as though there were a unified opposition. You know very well that that is not the case. You are unified, we are not. So your argument does not make sense.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. I'm not seeing any other members requesting the floor.

Mr. Mark Warawa: On a point of order, Chair, just procedurally also, when we speak, are we to speak to you, through the chair? Are we to speak to one another?

The Chair: No, parliamentary procedure is that you are to speak to the chair and through the chair, so I do request that we respect parliamentary procedure.

Thank you, Mr. Warawa.

Seeing no further comments, I'll call the question on the amendment, which asks that there be a member present from every party to hear witnesses in a reduced quorum.

(Motion negatived)

•(1050)

The Chair: So we're back to the original motion of reduced quorum.

Is there any further comment?

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Chair, this is my first opportunity to speak to the original motion. We've spoken to three different amendments, and all three have failed. The concern has been expressed clearly that the way it is written is not in the spirit of fairness in the situation of a minority government.

In the situation this committee finds itself in now, it reads "that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three members are present, including one member of the opposition". What I don't want to see happen, Chair, is that we have the opposition members trying to run their own committee and having their own meetings. The government should be there. There is a role for the government to play in this committee.

Now, what is the safety valve in that? Is it hidden in there, or is it clearly spelled out? So my question to the clerk is what is the safety valve to make sure that the opposition members do not start running their own committee?

The Chair: Go ahead.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, thank you.

I would presume that any meeting held by this committee would have been discussed at the subcommittee. You've adopted a motion at the subcommittee, of which the government is a member, so that's where your hearing would flow, from the subcommittee. That would be one measure of protection, I presume.

The second one would be that, as the chair explained, it's the chair that calls the meeting, and if the chair feels that the committee is not working in a manner that is procedurally acceptable and within the rules of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons and within the practice established by this committee, then the chair has the option to not call a meeting. And the members have options to request that the chair does call a meeting under Standing Order 106, I believe.

So there are measures in place both ways.

The Chair: You may have a follow-up question, and then Mr. Bigras.

Mr. Mark Warawa: I have a couple more questions, Chair, for the clerk.

The first answer referred to the subcommittee. Now, the subcommittee does not have any authority to make decisions. They make recommendations, which have to then come back to this body and be approved. Is that correct?

The Clerk: That's correct, sir.

Mr. Mark Warawa: So those will be strictly recommendations. Could you clarify, then, when you talked about the decisions or approvals through the subcommittee, how would that protect this committee, making sure the opposition does not take over the committee?

The Clerk: You're asking very good questions, Mr. Warawa.

As you pointed out, any decision by the steering committee has to be approved by the full committee.

Mr. Mark Warawa: So the only safety valve to protect the integrity of this committee is the chair. So my question is, could you define the chair? Would a deputy chair be considered the chair?

The Clerk: No, sir, unless the chair so requested.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you.

The Chair: I have Mr. Bigras, Mr. McGuinty, and Mr. Braid.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I would just like us to vote on this. We have debated the issue for over 50 minutes. I think everything has been said.

[English]

The Chair: As long as I have people on the speakers list, I cannot call the question.

Mr. McGuinty.

Mr. David McGuinty: Call the question.

The Chair: Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid: I want to suggest that perhaps we go back and revisit the authority of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure and give that subcommittee the authority to confirm what evidence the committee should, in turn, hear—to provide that safety valve at that level.

I'm equally disappointed that we're not in a position to move on and discuss substantive issues. And I would agree with my colleagues on this side that rules should equally apply, and the spirit and the letter should equally apply and that a risk of one side blocking equally applies to all sides.

• (1055)

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make this clear and on the record. What I understand from this discussion is that Mr. McGuinty, Mr. Scarpaleggia, Mr. Trudeau, Mr. Bigras, Mr. Ouellette, and Ms. Duncan are insisting on the opposition's right to boycott witnesses and not to have a witness heard at their discretion, regardless of where the witnesses came from. The only reason we're having this discussion right now is that the motion, as it is currently before this committee, requires the attendance of an opposition member and that it's that attendance that allows the opposition to boycott a committee and consequently to require a witness to have come from Alberta, or wherever else, to this committee and to potentially not be heard. It seems to me that's what the position of the opposition boils down to.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want some clarification on the reduced quorum. I've been able to travel substantially with other committees. I don't know how much the environment committee travels. I was here briefly in the last Parliament. I've made my argument before about having members present from both sides of this table to be able to verify and validate testimony as it's reported by our analysts, who usually do a very good job of being impartial and making sure that everything's accurate and correct. I certainly wasn't questioning the integrity of the work they do, but I think the point is still valid.

Furthermore, the routine motion goes back to the days when it was a check put in place to make sure that the tyranny of a majority government wouldn't run over the minority opposition. What we have here is quite different, and Mr. Ouellette has pointed out and seemed to suggest that perhaps the three opposition parties weren't working in cooperation. Well, I believe I've seen the three leaders—I think it was actually in this very room where we're sitting today—of

those three parties actually sign a document in front of all Canadians indicating their willingness to work together. So I have some doubts about that statement from Mr. Ouellette, with all due respect.

I remember my experience on the justice committee last year as well, where we certainly had filibustering, the blocking of legislation coming through. We had dilatory motions being put forward on a regular basis. We seemed to have those kinds of shenanigans going on.

I think what the intent or the spirit of the particular amendments that have all been defeated.... And I should point out that the NDP has given up its right to veto a meeting, the Bloc Québécois has given up its right to veto a meeting, and so has the Liberal Party given up its right to veto a meeting, all in favour of only supporting something that would allow them to collectively veto a meeting together, forcing or having a situation where the governing party does not have a member present to hear that testimony.

What it really comes down to is the optics we would have as a committee, when a witness would travel here from another part of the country, and that could be a very difficult thing. As parliamentarians—and I as a western Canadian—we travel here all the time. I'm used to it; I accept the fact that it's part of my responsibility. But for somebody who takes the time out of their own personal schedule to fly from British Columbia, from the Yukon, from up north.... We have a very large country; we have adverse weather conditions; we have all kinds of obstacles that face us on a daily basis, in getting here.

I think nothing frustrates Canadians more than when parliamentarians play games, especially at their personal expense. So to have witnesses refused an opportunity to deliver testimony, simply because of the political manoeuvring or positioning that sometimes happens here, I think reflects poorly not only on us as parliamentarians, but it reflects poorly on the institution for which we're here to uphold the highest of integrity.

Now, the checks and balances—

• (1100)

The Chair: I don't like to interrupt you, but our allotted time has expired. It is 11 o'clock, and I understand we have members here who have other committees they need to be going to.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Yes, I'm one of them, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: So I'm going to entertain a motion to adjourn. Does anybody want to make that motion?

Mr. Watson has moved the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll adjourn and we'll continue this discussion on Thursday morning at nine o'clock.

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