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—
Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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• (1530)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Angela Crandall): Honourable members, I see a quorum.

I am Angela Crandall, the clerk assigned to this committee. I will have a new clerk, Jean-Marie David, assisting me for a couple of months.

I am now ready to receive motions of nomination for the position of chair.

Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): I would like to nominate Mr. Sorenson.

The Clerk: Are there any other motions for nomination?

The motion before the committee is that Kevin Sorenson be elected chair of the committee. Is it the will of the committee that Mr. Sorenson be elected chair?

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Absolutely.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Is it the will of the committee to elect the vice-chairs now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: Mr. Goldring

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): I'd like to nominate Mr. Patry as vice-chair.

The Clerk: Are there any other motions for nomination of vice-chair?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Are there nominations for second vice-chair of the opposition?

Madame Deschamps.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): I move that Mr. Paul Crête be elected second vice-chair.

The Clerk: Is it the pleasure of the committee to accept the said motion?

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you, colleagues, for the vote of confidence. It's always nice to have those kinds of elections in which there's unanimity.

I welcome each one of you back to the foreign affairs and international development committee in this new session of Parliament. I trust that as we proceed through this next number of months or years, or however long this Parliament will stand, we will be able to look back at our committee and say there has been success in our deliberations and studies and that we've accomplished some things.

This meeting was called to elect the chair and the vice-chairs. We are open to a motion of adjournment or, if you like, we can move into the routine motions.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): I would like to move that we go to the routine motions.

The Chair: I will ask the clerk to circulate the routine motions from last year so you can see if there are amendments or changes you would like to see.

Before we begin, I would like to thank our clerk, Angela Crandall, for coming back as our clerk. We look forward to that. Angela has been serving the foreign affairs and international development committee since 2005. Speaking on behalf of our committee, I would like to say that we do appreciate the work that you do.

I would also like to thank Gerry Schmitz for the hard work that he has provided our committee over a number of years. I know he has a long corporate memory of what's gone on in this committee. He has been the author and researcher of many reports that we have filed in Parliament. He is no longer going to be our lead researcher here. I would like to welcome James Lee to that position. James is no stranger to this committee. He has worked alongside Gerry for many years. As long as I've been on this committee, I remember James being a part of it in one way or another.

On the one hand, we're going to miss the hard work and dedication of Gerry Schmitz, but James, it's also good to have you as our researcher. Again, we want to thank the Library of Parliament for the great work they do.

I think everyone has the routine motions now.

Mr. Dewar.

•(1535)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): I was going to raise a question. Perhaps it's better if I wait until the second motion for the committee, about analysts, particularly about Gerry. So he is not with us?

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Paul Dewar: When is it appropriate to raise the question about what services we have and who it is? I'm just curious about the process therein. In other words, how is that decision made?

The Chair: Probably at the second motion, I would think.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'll wait until then.

The Chair: All right. We'll move into the first motion as presented on the paper in front of you.

I also want to thank Mr. Patry. Mr. Patry is a former chair of this committee and we've worked closely with him. Certainly in the position of chair I have appreciated his counsel on different occasions.

Welcome back, Bernard.

The first motion is that the chair, the two vice-chairs, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and a member of the New Democratic Party compose the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Chair, I was wondering if we could entertain an amendment to this one. I have mentioned this before. I believe in the McGrath report's contention that there not be parliamentary secretaries on the committee. However, in the spirit of compromise and understanding, we do have parliamentary secretaries on committee, and some of my colleagues would want to see that remain.

However, as I look at the steering subcommittee, I think it's important, of course, that we have members of all parties. The fact is that you are the chair and we have two vice-chairs, but I think it's reasonable to ask that it not be a position for the parliamentary secretary. Committees are here to perform duties that are separate from the executive at best, but there it is, we have a parliamentary secretary on committee. But at the steering subcommittee, at least, we should have some independence from that. I always welcome Mr. Obhrai's interventions. They are wonderful and they're helpful, but I think it would be better if they were left to committee, not to subcommittee.

Essentially I want to move an amendment to the motion to have the chair, the two vice-chairs, a member from each party—who would already be included by the nature of having a vice-chair and a chair from the Liberal and Conservative parties—and members of the other parties make up the subcommittee, and drop the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs from the subcommittee.

•(1540)

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, as much as I know that the NDP would like to take the parliamentary secretary off, it is part of this

thing. I think it is contradictory for him to say that parliamentary secretaries shouldn't be there but a member from the government should. I am a member from the government whether I am parliamentary secretary or not, so I can be on that committee in whatever capacity.

I want to bring out a point here. There now has been a change in the composition in the House of Commons. The Conservative Party has more seats than it did in the last Parliament, the 39th. This motion is coming from the 39th Parliament. This motion is not coming from the 40th Parliament and is not reflective of the composition of the House of Commons now in that there are more seats for the Conservative Party.

Therefore, I suggest that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure have two members from the government side, and then have it as it is stated here to reflect the composition of the House of Commons. By the way, Mr. Chair, as is the practice and as the bylaws say, this should reflect the composition of the House of Commons. I would propose that we put one extra individual in there as a member from the government, so that there would be two members from the government and one from each party, and they would form it to reflect that.

As for the name “parliamentary secretary”, it is our prerogative as to who would be on that subcommittee, not yours. It could be me. It could be him. It could be anybody. It's our choice to say who is going to go there. If you don't like the words “parliamentary secretary”, we can remove “parliamentary secretary” and say “two government members”, but it will be our choice as to who they are.

An hon. member: Are you resigning?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: No.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai, what you are really suggesting here is a subamendment to the motion. Your subamendment would be for the addition of one more government member on the steering committee. Is that correct?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Reflective of the composition of the House of Commons.

The Chair: It's the last Parliament.

Are there any other comments on Mr. Obhrai's position?

Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Yes, we need to discuss the one by Mr. Dewar first, because what you said was to get two Conservatives. That's what you wanted to add, but you deleted the parliamentary secretary that time. That's one of the two.... It doesn't matter.

Hon. Bob Rae: Do you want to be there or not?

Mr. Bernard Patry: Yes.

The Chair: I think what Mr. Obhrai is saying is that if you take out the parliamentary secretary from the motion and just allow the government to decide which two or three....

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: And that could be me, right?

Mr. Bob Rae: I don't know. It's up to your colleagues.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Dewar, are you suggesting the parliamentary secretary should not be on the steering committee?

Mr. Paul Dewar: That's correct, so drop it from the motion.

Some hon. members: No, no.

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Obhrai, just let Mr. Dewar finish.

Mr. Paul Dewar: It's a very simple amendment. Just drop the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and include... We already have the composition of the chair and two vice-chairs—you have your complement right there—and a member from the Conservatives, and that is fine, but I'm talking specifically about the parliamentary secretary. I reference the McGrath commission, which said there shouldn't be parliamentary secretaries on committees at all. Fair enough. Not everyone agrees with that. But I'm saying that when we're talking about the steering committee, the subcommittee, the committee should be able to be separate from, if you will, the reach of the cabinet.

Parliamentary secretaries do not ask questions in the House, and neither do ministers. Committees should be able to do their own business without that. I don't think it precludes Mr. Obhrai's intervention and contribution—we all welcome that—but in terms of the steering committee, there should not be a parliamentary secretary. So you would have chair, vice-chairs, a member from the other side, Mr. Goldring, Mr. Lunney, Ms. Brown, whom I don't know but will soon know, and they can do a wonderful job. To not have the parliamentary secretary in the steering committee I think gives them opportunity and it levels the field, if you will.

• (1545)

The Chair: Mr. Goldring, and then Mr. Crête.

Mr. Peter Goldring: I think possibly there's a third option that can be looked at here: the chair, two vice-chairs, two government members, one of whom may be parliamentary secretary to the minister. That can be given as an option.

The Chair: I don't think you have to put anything about “may be parliamentary secretary”.

Mr. Peter Goldring: If you want “will”, put “will”.

The Chair: No, no.

Mr. Crête.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): I think we have to go back to the true nature of the position. Committees are normally independent from government action. The desire is that committees can control their own agenda and make their own choices. The question really has nothing to do with the parliamentary secretary as a person, but we have to ask ourselves, if, as a committee, we want to be completely autonomous, whether someone who is on the committee to represent the government should be there. In that sense, I think that the ideal situation would be, as my NDP colleague has suggested, to remove the parliamentary secretary. It is all about giving ourselves as many opportunities as we can to operate autonomously when making the choices that we will soon have to make about our future work and about how the steering committee should proceed. That never

prevents the government from making its views known through any of its members, who are in the majority.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Crête.

Mr. Obhrai.

We have a speaking list here, so if you want to be put on, please let me know.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, there is a problem here. One minute we say we're independent, and the next minute you have somebody from the other side telling us who is going to be on the committee and who is not going to be on the committee. The choice of who is going to be on the committee from the government side is going to be made by the government side, not by the NDP or by the opposition. Therefore, calling for this is actually not conducive to running this thing.

I would suggest you allow that choice on the government side. I'm not asking who should be there from the other side. I'm not pointing the finger and saying who you should appoint. What is yours is yours; what is ours is ours. Therefore, I cannot accept the amendment that says the NDP is going to tell us who is going to be in the chair or who is not going to be in the chair. It is our prerogative to decide, and we will decide on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Lunney, Mr. Patry, and then Mr. Dewar.

Mr. James Lunney: I've been around a few years and served on a number of committees, but it seems to me that most of the time, regardless of which side of the House we're sitting on, the composition of the steering committee was somewhat reflective of the proportions of the party representation in the House. Out of respect, it's only fair and reasonable to expect that the government would be represented on the steering committee by at least the two members. In fact, probably to be fair it should be three members of the government—the PS, the chair, and one other relevant to three on the other side—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Five.

Mr. James Lunney: I think the way this is written it's two government members—the chair, the parliamentary secretary, the two vice-chairs, plus the member from the NDP. That still gives the opposition actually a majority of voices on that steering committee, and I think that is certainly reasonable on our side. We probably could be arguing for a third member on that subcommittee. As I say, at that point you're talking about half the members of the committee, and it seems to me a little overly zealous, but perhaps we could at least have two government representatives on there. I don't think the way it's proposed is unreasonable.

The Chair: Are you suggesting two or three? The chair is automatically there, but he's from the government side.

Mr. James Lunney: Okay. So what we're arguing for is the chair, the PS, and one other member.

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: Well, that's what you're arguing for. That's not what Mr. Dewar....

What the motion is referring to is whether the parliamentary secretary should be included in the steering committee. If that motion is passed without a subamendment, then there won't be a subamendment. I haven't really heard a subamendment. So if Mr. Dewar's motion is passed, any parliamentary secretary would not serve on the subcommittee.

Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I think we're discussing... We've been like this before. I think we should word it that the chair, the two vice-chairs, a Conservative member—it could be the PS or not the PS—and a member from the New Democratic Party do compose a subcommittee.

I must say that when the PS is there—he's not obliged to be there—it accelerates the discussion of the subcommittee, to be honest about this. The fact is if we want to have any minister appear in front of the committee, he's got the agenda of the minister and he can say yes, the minister is there, or he's not there, instead of going back to the main committee and saying no, the minister cannot come. That could delay a lot of the work we want to do.

This would be my subamendment: that the chair, the two vice-chairs, a Conservative member, and an NDP member do compose a subcommittee. That means it will be five members—two Conservative and three from the opposition. At the end, it's the same thing, because all the decisions that are taken by the subcommittee need to be ruled on by the main committee at the end. It always comes back to the main committee.

This way I don't see a problem adding this change, and the PS could come. It's just a Conservative member.

•(1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I thank Mr. Patry for his intervention.

I simply want to note that we're talking about the subcommittee here, so to my friend Mr. Lunney and others who are into proportionality arguments, we're talking about planning. It's the subcommittee. Let's not get carried away here. We plan things; we don't decide things. We decide what we want to coordinate. So it's not a matter of proportionality here; it's a matter of planning. You know that, I think.

In fact, if we look at the standard—and the clerk might be able to help us here—the standard for committees is four. The standard is the chair, two vice-chairs, and one from another opposition party.

I simply was stating the fact that we have tried to have committees be more independent. I think that was the reason and one of the rationales for the founding of association with your party, so that the committees were actually masters of their own business. The McGrath report, which I recommend to all of you, stated there shouldn't even be parliamentary secretaries on committees at all. In fact, if you're going to have independence of committees, why would you have a parliamentary secretary?

I hear my friend Mr. Patry's point, and it's a fair one. I note that the other side of the equation is that sometimes you aren't able to be masters of your committee when there's another agenda at the table.

The standard for most committees, and the standard that has been in this place forever, is four, which is the chair, two vice-chairs, and an opposition member. That has nothing to do with the proportionality argument. So let's argue apples and apples here.

In the spirit of my colleague Mr. Patry wanting to suggest some positive intervention, and that it's up to the party to decide, just strike parliamentary secretary and a member of the governing party in this case, as opposed to having it dictated. So Mr. Lunney or Mr. Goldring or Ms. Brown could one day be on that steering committee, but that would be up to you, wouldn't it, Mr. Obhrai?

I would welcome Mr. Patry's amendment, and put that forward and move on. In other words, strike parliamentary secretary and put member from the....

The Chair: All right. I think we're building toward a bit of a consensus, at least on that.

Mr. Abbott, please.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): As I understand Mr. Patry's amendment, the idea is that the government on this subcommittee would be represented at a given committee meeting by a member of the government undefined by this larger committee. In other words, if the government chose that Mr. Obhrai would generally be attending on behalf of the government, but something was coming up specifically about CIDA, say, or something like that, then I might sub for Mr. Obhrai. We're just talking about a position open for the government and the government to choose who would be there. Is that what Mr. Dewar has agreed to?

A voice: Yes.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Okay.

•(1555)

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: The issue, as we said, of who's going be there is for us to decide, and Bernard Patry has said it. That's fine, we agree to that. I still have a difficulty here with the argument that we need only four people on the subcommittee because we are talking about issues and then it comes down to the main committee to decide. However, let me just point out that the subcommittee does vote on issues to bring in front of the main committee. The subcommittee does vote: do you agree to that?

Therefore, since this subcommittee has the power to strike the agenda that will and will not come in here, it is going to need to be reflective of the composition of this committee sitting right here—one, two, three, four, five, six, and one, two, three, four, five, six. That should also be on that subagenda and reflect that, because the business that comes over there comes from this thing.

Now, I see the foreign affairs critic...because he thinks he's such a high guy and doesn't like to discuss this issue; it's good enough. But I would say this: because we discuss issues and there is a possibility, a strong possibility, when certain things that come on the agenda are not discussed, then I say, reflective of this, that this committee should be reflective of the House of Commons. It would then require two members from the government, the chair, and one each from there. That would be six there and six on this side. That's the way it should be. And if I'm not mistaken, that should also be in the bylaw, and reflective of it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai. I'm not certain it is in the bylaw. That's something we can check on.

At any rate, if that's all from the speakers list, then we'll call the question on Mr. Obhrai's subamendment that the—

Mr. Bernard Patry: What is the subamendment?

The Chair: His subamendment is to add another government member.

Mr. Bernard Patry: No. He is adding two government members. He wants to have the PS and a government member. I just want to be sure what we're voting on.

The Chair: This is what we're voting on first. I kind of think it's going to be a friendly amendment to what Mr. Patry has brought forward. Mr. Dewar has said that he's willing to...

We will first vote on the subamendment, which is to add another government member to the steering committee, reflective of this committee.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Would you read it, please? I want to see what you mean.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai's subamendment would mean that the chair, the two vice-chairs, two members of the government, and a member from the New Democratic Party do compose the subcommittee on agenda, and so on. That is the subamendment. Then we'll go back to what Mr. Patry says.

All in favour of Mr. Obhrai's subamendment?

(Subamendment negated)

The Chair: Now we will move to the amendment by Mr. Patry, which would read that the chair, the two vice-chairs, with another government member, and a member of the NDP do compose the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I thought the coalition was dead.

An hon. member: It's still alive if you keep acting like that.

The Chair: That is carried. We're finished with number one.

Let's move right along to the second motion, that the committee retain the services of one or more analysts from the Parliamentary Information and Research Service of the Library of Parliament, as needed, to assist it in its work, at the discretion of the chair.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I just had a question on this for the clerk. What services did we have in the last Parliament? What was the makeup?

The Clerk: Through the chair, we had a principal analyst and an analyst, James Lee and Gerry Schmidt, and, as needed, any other analyst would come on to the committee.

Mr. Paul Dewar: So I'm correct in understanding that we had two analysts on a regular basis and a third when needed. Right now, we have James, who is replacing Gerry.

•(1600)

The Clerk: We also have, I believe, Melissa Radford, who will be assisting the committee on a regular basis. So we will have two on a regular basis and will continue to call on the service of any specialist we need from the Library of Parliament.

Mr. Paul Dewar: So the complement remains the same. Just the names have changed.

The Clerk: Exactly.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Where's Gerry now?

The Chair: Depending on who you speak to, he is still within the Library of Parliament but promoted to a different position. We can communicate with him, though, if need be.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Oh. So the complement's the same. We have two. We need two full time.

The Chair: Yes. If we meet and we say, listen, last year we had Gerry, James, and Natalie—I think we realized that with the reports we were doing we needed Natalie there to help out—and if it is indeed the case again, we would make that request again.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I just wanted that clarification. That was it. Thank you.

The Chair: All in favour of routine motion 2?

Do we have to have a mover and a seconder on each one of these?

The Clerk: Just a mover.

The Chair: Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Sorry to interrupt. It says here that we "retain the services of one or more". In the past, we've always had two. So would it not be better to—

The Chair: This is the same motion.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I know what the motion is, but the result is that we've always had two. I just want to ensure that we're always going to have two. This motion doesn't say that.

The Chair: We will have two. It's the same motion.

Paul moves the motion. All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Motion 3 is that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three members are present, including a member of the opposition, but when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present.

Monsieur Crête.

Excusez. First, do we have a mover for this motion? Then we'll come into debate. We have Mr. Abbott.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: I move that we remove everything from "...including a member of the opposition..." and add "...provided that at least three members are present, including a member of the opposition" to what remains. So we would keep "...a member of the opposition..." but we would take out the rest. We would take everything from "...but when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present." This is because it creates uncertainty, a laxity that I do not think is justified. We should make sure that the quorum is three members, including one from the opposition.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Patry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry: I do not agree for one simple reason: it has happened that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development has travelled to several cities across Canada at the same time. So we could be in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. The committee has 12 members, and if only two are in Montreal, no meeting could be held and witnesses could prepare briefs that no one would hear. It has happened several times before. We could start a meeting with two members in order to hear witnesses. I even sat by myself once, in Montreal, because my colleagues from other parties for various good reasons had to leave. This is my simple reason. It is easy to get three people when we travel abroad with a full committee; we had planned to go to Washington and New York. But when we travel in our own country, the committee could split into two or three groups. In that case, it would be quite impossible to have three members at all sessions. That is why I support this motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: I know that we have been outside the country and, as Mr. Patry said, there are times when you get one or two. If my memory serves me correctly, I remember once Madam McDonough was called back for a funeral and all of a sudden there was a real lack. These people show up and this allows us to still take the presentation.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, I agree with Bernard. It has been the practice in the past committee that people haven't shown up. I won't repeat the argument of what Bernard has said. He said it from experience and we know that is what happens.

What I want to say is on a point of clarity. If you're going to say three members and one from the opposition, I think you just say one member of the government and one member of the opposition in

order to make it clear. When we say three members and one from the opposition, it is presumed the government member is already there—it's presumed. Just make it as a point of clarity to say one member of the opposition and one from the government. That's my understanding. This one reads in a manner that says at least one member from the opposition, which presumes the other will be from the government. Let's have clarity—one and one.

● (1605)

The Chair: I have a question to the clerk. A meeting will never start unless you have a chair. If the chair and a government member are not present, does that allow the vice-chair to take the chair and still conduct the meeting?

The Clerk: If the chair hasn't designated an acting chair, then the committee would elect an acting chair, normally.

The Chair: So what this motion does is say that you must have an opposition member, but you don't have to have a government member.

The Clerk: That's true.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Then let's have clarity and say one government, one opposition, just for clarity.

The Chair: Are you moving a motion?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Yes, I'm putting a motion to clarify.

The Chair: That you must have at least one—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: One opposition and one government. We're just clarifying it.

The Clerk: We're getting confused, because we do have one motion on the floor, and his amendment really doesn't have anything to do with the motion that's on the floor—the amendment.

The Chair: Yes, it does, because the motion is saying that you must have quorum.

The Clerk: The amendment by Mr. Crête is just about removing this part here.

The Chair: You're right. It's my error, and I'll take the blame here.

I think we need to keep our discussion at this point on Mr. Crête's amendment. What we are speaking to is whether, when we're travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, the meeting begins after 15 minutes regardless of the members present. Let's try to keep our discussion to that at this juncture.

Mr. Abbott.

Hon. Jim Abbott: I would like to suggest to Mr. Crête that having spent 13 years in opposition, I understand the member's concern. However, this is to receive evidence and have the evidence printed, as opposed to there being some voting or decision-making being made by the members of the committee. There is a significantly different level of trust that has to be put to this. While I understand Mr. Crête's position, I don't think it's an item of deep concern.

The Chair: Mr. Crête.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Let us vote.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. We're ready for the question on Mr. Crête's amendment, and then we will vote on the motion.

(Amendment negatived)

The Chair: Now we will come back to the motion.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: My amendment to the motion is that for clarity we say “one member of the government and one member of the opposition”.

The Chair: Any discussion on that?

Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney: I would like to return to the point raised by Dr. Patry. I think I heard him say that there were times when travelling when you found it necessary for good reasons to hear testimony by yourself as the chair at that time. If we're saying one and one, are we now precluding that this kind of scenario could happen, where only one member could actually hear testimony if the second one were disabled? That's not what you're saying?

Mr. Bernard Patry: What we're saying is that when we're sitting here in Ottawa we need to have a number, and when we're out, after 15 minutes it could be one, two, or three, it doesn't matter, but you can hear witnesses.

Mr. James Lunney: Okay.

The Chair: All right, so this is on meetings here in Parliament when we are not travelling. What makes up a quorum—that's the basic question. Does it need to have opposition? Does it need to have government members?

Any other discussion on that, or are we ready for the question?

All in favour of Mr. Obhrai's amendment that would say there must be one government member present for quorum.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: No; one government and one opposition. I'm adding one member.

The Chair: You're adding one government member to the motion, right?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: The motion as amended is that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three members are present, including a member of the opposition and a government member, but when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present.

Mr. Crête.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: The amendment that we have just passed—which really leads me to wonder whether I am going to vote for the motion—gives the government an absolutely extraordinary right of veto. We are actually stipulating that, in order to have a quorum, there must be a government member.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think that is correct. There has to be an opposition member and a government member.

Mr. Patry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry: But it is still just when we are hearing witnesses, not when we are making decisions. This is about hearing witnesses, not about preparing reports or voting. Otherwise, if they are in the meeting for 10 minutes, for example, opposition members could start by themselves, without the chair or the vice-chairs, and the meeting is in session. No, we must all act as a united group.

No decisions are being made, no votes are being held. This is just about hearing witnesses.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's to start the meeting; it's to begin the meeting. You get your witnesses here. Can you listen to testimony? If it's all government and no opposition, no. If it's all opposition and no government, what passed says no.

Mr. Crête.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: I just want to draw the committee's attention to this real possibility. After inviting people to come and give evidence, we are giving the government a tool if it does not want to hear a given witness. If no government member is present, the witness cannot be heard since a government member must be present for there to be a quorum and for witnesses to be heard.

We must establish very clearly that, when witnesses are called, we do not intend to play that game. Otherwise, it can get very frustrating. People might come from all over the place to give evidence, and, all of a sudden, the government members could all get up and leave. That may be a political choice, but the consequence would be that invited guests would be prevented from giving evidence.

[*English*]

The Chair: That certainly hasn't ever been the practice of this committee that I can recall.

The other thing is, witnesses are submitted, and we have the opportunity to go through the witness list earlier than that. There are many times when other parties will say, “Listen, we'd rather this witness not be part of the presentations”. That's the place to deal with that. This is more just to hear the witnesses.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Well, actually, it's on that point, Chair, now that you mention it. If, for instance, the government doesn't want to hear from a witness—I'm not saying you would ever do that, but conceivably that could happen. I guess that's the concern.

The fact that the rules were written the way they were before was to avoid that. In effect, you're saying that if you don't want to hear from a witness, and you as the chair and the government don't want to hear from whatever group, you could easily shut it down—not that you would ever do that. It's not in any book, I'm sure, but it's something you could do, the way it's written. I know that's not what anyone is contemplating here, but by design, if you decided you didn't want it, you could have a veto on it.

The Chair: Mr. Abbott.

Hon. Jim Abbott: I find this argument a little circular, because the fact of the matter is that if an opposition member does not turn up, the testimony cannot be heard. If a government member does not turn up, the witness cannot be heard. It's quid pro quo. What is good for the goose is good for the gravy. So I don't understand the argument.

The Chair: Thank you.

An hon. member: I think you mixed your metaphors there.

The Chair: We have Mr. Crête again and then Mr. Obhrai. Did I see Mr. Lunney's hand?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: I just want to remind ourselves that, in the great majority of cases, people who come to give evidence have things to say that are not necessarily what the government wants to hear. Those people are looking for an opportunity to give evidence to the committee. To start with, the opposition wanted to make sure that there could be a quorum if an opposition member were present. But we do not need to spend the whole day debating this. Let us get it settled.

•(1615)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Crête.

Mr. Obhrai. Do you pass?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I pass.

The Chair: You pass.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Call the question.

The Chair: Did I see your hand, James?

Mr. James Lunney: No, I'm ready for the question.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Motion number 4 is that witnesses be given ten minutes for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated ten minutes for the first questioner of each party when a minister appears before the committee and five minutes for the other meetings, and that thereafter five minutes be allocated to each subsequent questioner, alternating between government and opposition parties.

Do we have a mover for that motion?

Mr. Dewar moves.

Mr. Lunney, and then Mr. Crête.

Mr. James Lunney: Let me just suggest that having opening statements of ten minutes is fine. The witnesses come a long way to make a statement. That's no problem. But when you're talking about a ten-minute intervention for the first questioners, I want to suggest maybe that could be worked down to seven minutes to allow people to get into a second round and allow more members of the committee to actually participate.

Can I make that an amendment—

The Chair: Yes, you may.

Mr. James Lunney: —that the first round be seven minutes?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Yes.

Mr. James Lunney: To ask them questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: That gives everyone at least two rounds.

Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: I'm not going to argue on this, but I must say that changes when you're questioning the minister. Believe me, you could have one question for the minister, and the minister could answer for five or six minutes, and that's it, it's over. That's why in the opposition sometimes we split. If we have ten minutes, we'll get two questioners right away in the beginning, and the minister answers. That's for the minister.

The Chair: Again, Mr. Patry is right.

In the meetings when there is a non-minister present, the first round is five minutes each, and then the second round is five minutes as well. But when the minister is here, it goes to ten minutes each round.

Mr. Obhrai, on a point of clarification.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: In motion number 3, where we are saying ten minutes, you just said that when there is no minister here the round is five minutes, and when the minister is here the round is ten minutes. Am I understanding it right? This motion here is only for the minister. Is that what it is?

The Chair: That's right, for the first part of the motion.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: What do you mean? Let's clarify this point here.

The Chair: I can tell you, just from practice, that it seems to me—for those who have been on this committee before—that there has been, as you know, a fair bit of leniency here to give everyone opportunities to finish. There is no time clock here that shuts you down after seven minutes. Many times we've had splits, and a two-and-a-half-minute split, when you had four, made it much less. It seems to me we were going for seven, weren't we?

The Clerk: We weren't following this routine motion.

The Chair: We weren't following by the letter of the law. We were trying to accommodate. I think we were moving to seven minutes.

If you want me to go back to the five and just do it like this, we could, but we've tried to give and take on this one.

Mr. Crête.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: I would like to get one thing clear. Is there a mover for the original text?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes. Who was it?

The Clerk: Mr. Dewar put his hand up.

The Chair: Mr. Dewar did.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête: OK. Can someone tell us exactly what the present motion is? I understood that we were giving witnesses seven minutes rather than ten. Is that what we are saying, or is it something else?

[English]

The Chair: I don't know if you still want to move that, do you?

An hon. member: Do you mean for the first round?

The Chair: It's for when there's a minister.

Mr. James Lunney: Minister or no minister, why don't we just leave it as seven minutes for the first round? Then hopefully we'll get more rounds for everybody participating. That's the intention of the motion.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Crête.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête: I feel that, when the minister appears, we have to allow ten minutes. We absolutely need that. But when it is not the minister, I think that we could perhaps go to seven minutes for the first round and five minutes for the second. That is my proposal. With ministers, we have to take the necessary time. If it is not the minister, we give ourselves a little more time first and then we have a second round of five minutes. I am interested in an amendment that says we allow seven minutes for the first round, unless we are dealing with the minister.

• (1620)

[English]

The Chair: We'll keep it going in the order here.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring: I want to emphasize that by going to the seven minutes—and we all know that in some meetings we run out of time at the end and we can't make it to the additional rounds—it does give the extra period of questioning time at the end of the meeting for more questions from the opposition too. It gives more time, more rounds.

The Chair: My experience is that when a minister comes it's usually for one hour; it's not for two hours so we can go forever. I noticed in the past the NDP very often got one round. I think the intention was that everyone at least gets two rounds here. With ten minutes, you could split five each, and the government could do the same, the minister could go a little longer, and I guarantee you there will be some party that will never get a second round.

Your amendment is even with ministers...? Do I understand that you're saying regardless of whether there's a minister, or just the everyday meeting without a minister, that the first round be seven minutes and five thereafter, or are you trying...? Mr. Crête, on the other hand, says the first round should be ten.

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Chair, my experience at committee has been that it's not that often that we actually get the minister here.

The Chair: Oh, we do here.

Mr. James Lunney: Do you? Okay. Well, that's an exception to other committees I've served on.

My point would be that the seven-minute round on the first round is designed to get more participation. It seems to me that other members, even those who are the first ones up questioning, might benefit from hearing the different lines of questions that come from other members of the committee and be able to ask very scintillating questions later in the round.

The Chair: Thank you.

Who else do we have?

Mr. Rae.

Hon. Bob Rae: I think it should be up to us in the opposition, in a way, because we're the ones.... Everyone wants to get at the minister. If we want to go ten and we want to allocate that time, I think we should be able to do that. I think the proposal would be that when the minister is here, at the opposition's discretion, the first round can go to ten minutes, everybody understanding what that does, but in other circumstances it would be seven. That seems to me a reasonable compromise.

The Chair: Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to speak in favour of the motion to move it to seven minutes. I haven't sat in committee before. I guess my question would be, is there any control over how long the minister has to answer? If the minister is going to take whatever length of time he wants to respond, then it does cut back on the number of questions that can be asked. A seven-minute time period would ask for far more information to be brought forward.

The Chair: The point is well taken. The seven minutes or the ten minutes, regardless, include the question and the answer. If the opposition uses up the entire ten minutes, the minister may not give much of an answer. On the other hand, the chair will very often encourage them to get to their point so that we can hear an answer. It's just a little bit of give and take. But your point is well taken.

The problem can be on splits. When you get two people who want to be on the record asking a question, it just doesn't leave a lot of time for the answer.

Are we ready for the question on Mr. Lunney's subamendment?

Mr. James Lunney: I was going with seven and five, but I think I'm hearing a consensus, perhaps, that when the minister is here we would have ten for the first round and for all other occasions seven. If that were a friendly amendment to my amendment, maybe we could make that the question and vote on it.

The Chair: Are you good with that?

Mr. Crête.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête: I just want to make sure that I fully understood. Are we saying ten minutes when the minister appears, seven minutes for others, and a second round of five minutes?

• (1625)

[English]

The Chair: Right. All in favour?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now we'll vote on the main motion.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: The next one is straightforward housekeeping: that, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation, and living expenses be reimbursed.

We need a mover.

Thank you, Mr. Abbott.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next one is that the committee be authorized to purchase documents for the use of the committee.

Again we need a mover.

Thank you, Mr. Patry.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On the next one, Madam Brown moves that the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion is that unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to have one staff person at in camera meetings and that one additional person from each party be allowed to be present.

This is moved by Mr. Lunney.

Mr. Obhrai, do you have a question?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Are we saying “one staff person” irrespective of the fact that the member is not there?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: So if a member is not...?

The Chair: Wait. Let me read this. Yes, if you are a member of the committee.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: No. The member is not present. Is his staff present?

The Chair: At an in camera meeting? You're still a member of the committee, so if you were not available, you could still have your staff member at an in camera meeting.

Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney: Just as a point of clarification, Mr. Chair, I guess this question would then come up. Let's suppose that member is there and you have another member subbing in. Would they also have a member present representing them?

Mr. Bernard Patry: No, it's just one member. You could have the one. That's the person you replace. It's one or the other.

The Chair: It's one or the other. That would give you two and you're allowed one.

Mr. James Lunney: I think that's worth clarifying. Thank you.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Lunney moved this. All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Next is that one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee.

It's moved by Mr. Patry.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Next is that the committee be authorized to purchase gifts to be presented to foreign hosts and visiting delegations.

It's moved by Mr. Patry.

(Motion agreed to)

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

It's moved by Mr. Pearson.

Mr. Crête.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: When we say official languages, are we talking about the documents provided by the clerk or just motions? I would like a motion, whether it is this one or a specific one, saying that documents should be distributed in both official languages unless the members of the committee decide otherwise. It is important because we do not have a motion about...

[*English*]

The Chair: It's a standard motion—that we cannot accept it unless there's unanimous consent.

Clerk, correct me if I'm wrong. It's not in every routine motion, but it's just common practice that these presentations are not given unless the printed material is in both official languages.

The Clerk: It's not distributed to committee members if it's not available in both official languages.

The Chair: We can accept it through the clerk; we can't distribute it. And then she will get it translated and then it will be distributed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: I sit on other committees and, as I understand it, we can have a motion saying that only documents in both official languages are distributed to committee members.

● (1630)

[*English*]

The Chair: You're correct. It cannot be distributed, but the clerk can receive it, send it to translation, and at a later date we would be given that testimony.

All right. Mr. Obhrai and then Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I will withdraw and Mr. Goldring will go.

Mr. Peter Goldring: I have difficulty with the statement that says “unless a substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration”. How do you define this? It could be defined very confusingly. You might have some housekeeping business, for example. Does that mean that any motion can be broadly defined and can be brought in and well under the 48 hours' notice? In other words, is it necessary to have that?

I would make a suggestion to delete that section, “unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration”. There are other ways and means to bring a motion forward, under unanimous consent, for example. I think that statement in there can be confusing and can be opened up to being too broadly interpreted and could be disruptive.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I think it's important to have this 48 hours' notice, so that everybody at the department has enough time to prepare for a response. So the intent and the idea is to have a 48 hours' notice motion so that everybody is able to prepare, including the department, the government, and the opposition themselves and the research and everybody. So I think we should stick strictly to the 48 hours' notice, as Mr. Goldring has suggested.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are you proposing an amendment here?

Mr. Peter Goldring: A deletion.

The Chair: And how would yours read then?

Mr. James Lunney: The part after “committee”, where it says “unless the substantive motion relates directly to the business then under consideration”—put brackets around that and that would be the deletion.

The Chair: So it goes to a cleaner motion, that it's just 48 hours' notice, without the qualifier.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Can I read a version here that I have, or a suggested version?

The Chair: Go ahead. You are on the speakers list.

Mr. Peter Goldring: It would be that 48 hours' notice shall be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, and that the motion shall be filed and distributed to members by the clerk in both official languages.

The Chair: Which is, in essence, what this is.

Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: My problem is that I don't think it's the same in French and in English, and I read it first in French. That could happen.

[*Translation*]

In French, it reads: “[...] que le Comité soit saisi d'une motion de fond qui ne porte pas directement sur l'affaire [...]”, whereas in English, it says

[*English*]

“unless the substantive motion relates directly”.

The Chair: That's not in the French version?

Mr. Bernard Patry: My understanding is that the motion needs 48 hours and that's it, and it cannot be discussed within 48 hours unless it comes to the main committee and they get unanimous consent from the main committee. That's it. That's what I understand. This is the way it should be done.

The Chair: That is the way it's done.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Yes. That's the way we're doing it.

The Chair: We don't take motions that are 24 hours' or 10 hours' notice.

Mr. Bernard Patry: We should say that 48 hours' notice should be observed before any substantive motion should be brought up to the main committee. That's it.

The Chair: All right. That's exactly what Mr. Lunney suggested, and which is what the French version says.

I have Mr. Crête and then Mr. Dewar.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: We have to make sure that this housekeeping motion makes it clear that the motion does not relate directly to the business that the committee is considering. We must make sure that it is not a way of blocking motions that do relate to the matter under discussion. It is very important for that to remain in the motion. I understood that the amendment was removing it. If we remove it, we are going to open up the same debate every time a motion on the question under discussion comes up.

The French text seem very well written to me. It makes it clear that we are talking about substantive motions that do not relate directly to the business that the committee is considering at the time. That absolutely must stay so that we do not have to be constantly debating whether a motion is in order or not.

• (1635)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'd like to go back to what Mr. Lunney was saying. For substantive motions, this is where the chair has had to rule in the past—when somebody brings a motion to committee and the chair says this motion is not part of what we're studying here; it needs 48 hours. That's when we say that. But I think that clause is in there because—Mr. Crête may be right, and Mr. Patry can correct me if I'm wrong—if we are in a study and coming out of that study we want a motion for the next meeting, or a motion specific to what we're studying, which we have done many a time.... In fact governments may bring a motion forward that says, considering what we've heard today, can we move this? And I'll say yes because it is in line with what we are discussing. So that might remove the ability to do that.

The clerk.

The Clerk: It would mean that every substantive motion would have to have 48 hours' notice. So it could be a limiting factor on the committee's ability to work.

The Chair: If a motion were put in place to change the direction or to move away...then I could say, listen, you have to resubmit that and give it 48 hours.

We've always done that. That's the chair's position on that. I see what you're saying.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I just want to ask the clerk, through you, what the standard practice of committees is regarding this.

The Clerk: There is a standard motion. We have a list of motions here that are slightly different from the ones that this committee adopts. It is exactly like this one. The only thing that's different is they leave a blank for the number of hours of notice. Each committee can decide whether it's 48 or 72 hours. But it is exactly like this unless a substantive motion relates directly to the business.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I give the example of RADARSAT-2 in the last Parliament. We had hearings, a study, and then there was a motion put forward supported by everyone. I think it should remain for reasons aforementioned. That's at the chair's discretion.

The Chair: Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Chair, hearing what appears to be a measure of consensus coming from around the table here, perhaps we do need to fix this so that the French matches the English. Then perhaps we need to change that to make sure the French includes the "unless" clause so that they're the same. Currently they're not compatible.

The Chair: We need to phrase it with the same meaning.

Mr. Crête.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête: I am going to vote against any amendment to the text as it presently stands. I want us to pass the existing motion. I want to tell you this right now so that we do get into any useless debate.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now vote on Mr. Lunney's amendment, or did you want to withdraw it?

Mr. James Lunney: I'll withdraw it.

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next one, colleagues, is that for motions requiring 48 hours' notice, the chair be authorized to defer consideration until 15 minutes prior to the adjournment time for the meeting as indicated in the notice of the meeting.

Again, this was put in place to keep that 15 minutes so that motions got dealt with.

Mr. Dewar, are you moving it?

• (1640)

Mr. Paul Dewar: No.

The Chair: We need a mover.

Mr. Patry, okay.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'll state my concern on this, Chair. I'm not sure if we can amend it to satisfy everyone, but I'll take a stab at it.

My concern is that I remember well that last time around, members who were anxious to get to business never got to it. The clock would always run out, or we would have very little time to get to it. Because it was the final 15 minutes, people wanted to...because of votes or whatever. Notwithstanding that there was 15 minutes at the end of meetings, the fact of the matter is that there wasn't always 15 minutes.

So either we have that business at the beginning of meetings or we just don't delegate exactly when that should happen, and it would be at the consensus of the committee. I look to others to give their impression on this, but I found that we often never got to business at the end. Notwithstanding the chair's trying to manage time well—and he did—it just happened that we ended up not getting to motions. It kind of fell off the table. At the end of committee business, often people don't want to get into it, or they have to leave or what have you.

I would like to hear from others on whether they have that same concern, and on whether we can agree on something to change it so that we can actually get to the business.

The Chair: We have Mr. Rae, Mr. Goldring, and Mr. Crête.

Hon. Bob Rae: It's a bit of a problem, Mr. Chairman. I don't know how we'd do it except by....

I've thought a lot about this, Paul. If you change it, the risk you run is that you end up spending your entire meetings talking about motions and getting nowhere, and not doing the substantive work, which, from my brief experience on the committee, we've been pretty good at doing. We've actually covered a lot of ground.

On the other hand, there is a problem. I've experienced that frustration; you have a motion that you think is really important and then we don't get to it. I'd ask the clerk about the list of motions we had from the last Parliament that we didn't get to. We never got to discuss them because we ran out of time every time.

I actually don't think there's a solution. I think all you can do is hope that where there's a deep feeling that we have to get at something, and it's a bit of an urgent matter, we try to work it out. But I think our real discussion has to be following the meeting of the committee, where we put in our proposals for what we want to do this session and try to anticipate some of the issues that we know are going to be coming up, and then say, "Okay, how are we going to handle these things?" I think the advantage of having this is that we're able to focus our attention on the issues that we've all agreed have to be done, and we don't end up getting caught by one party or another trying to move a gazillion motions to get us to fill up the schedule.

So it's not an easy choice, but I guess my sense would be that we would do the 15 minutes, and we'll just have to see how it goes. If it doesn't end up working, we can fight about it at some point and ask what all the issues are that we haven't been able to deal with and see if we can work it out. But I don't think there's a solution that doesn't create more problems.

The Chair: Yes, well said.

I think, for what it's worth, maybe what we're going to have to look at, if we do pass this motion, is that we try to arrange it so that we never have four on the last hour, for example. If four come to give their presentations, then yes, we're going to run out of time. Maybe what we're going to have to start looking at doing is cutting back that last hour of presentations, considering there will be motions to deal with.

So I agree with what I think most are suggesting: you have to keep the 15 minutes. But on the other hand, I would hate.... To be quite frank, I think it would be a disaster if we had it at the beginning of a meeting. You'll have presenters here, and debate will go on forever on our motions, and they've come from wherever.

All right, who else do we have? Mr. Goldring, Mr. Crête, Mr. Lunney, and Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Peter Goldring: I certainly agree with that, and it was going to be my point, too, to have the witnesses at the beginning of the meeting. Sometimes we have heated discussions. There are many other things. I think it is a matter of order and good process that it be kept to the end of the meeting. I think it could be disruptive.

You're starting a meeting well by having your witnesses properly ushered in and properly seated. From the point of orderly process, I think that should be maintained out of respect for the witnesses, and the discussion, should it ever be a heated discussion, should be in the final 15 minutes.

• (1645)

The Chair: Mr. Crête.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: This motion takes away a little of the strength that we provided with the motion on the 48 hours' notice. By doing that, we decided that there is some degree of urgency. This motion allows it to be put at the end of a meeting. So the impact of the motion is possibly reduced. I understand the argument that, when witnesses are present, they must absolutely be dealt with first. Now we must have something on the other side of the scale that allows us to have enough discussion. We could try 30 minutes instead of 15. Say that a meeting is scheduled from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. We could have the half-hour from 5:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Half an hour would mean less likelihood of avoiding the issue. That might be a possible compromise that would help us out of this situation. It is very frustrating to bring a motion forward and see that it is not going to be considered. The motion is important, we wait until the end of the meeting, and then we only have 15 minutes to consider it. We do not come to grips with the matter, and other things come up. Often, when we call witnesses, if we know in advance and if the rule is pretty clear, we can set the time aside. I find that, with 15 minutes, the frustration level gets a little high.

[*English*]

The Chair: I feel like I'm butting in here when I should be letting others speak. Maybe this is what our steering committee should do, and remember, let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater here. In the past, we've always been pressed on these reports. That's been the problem. Perhaps we need to say that we need one meeting for committee business. We've done that in the past many a time. Then it affords that opportunity.

I know that when you're working on the reports the way we have, we've basically gone past the cut-off date and have filed in the summer because we've been so pressured to get our reports done. Perhaps our steering committee needs to suggest a few more meetings where we specifically do committee business.

Mr. Lunney, Mr. Dewar, and Mr. Patry.

Mr. James Lunney: It's been said already, but I think the point about having the procedural motions at the end of the meeting is really appropriate, especially if we have witnesses present.

There are indignities for people who aren't used to the parliamentary process when we get into the importance of our motions, procedures, and rules of procedure, and get the clerk involved in what we can and can't do. It's not something we want to subject the witnesses to when they've come to pour their hearts out on some important issue.

If I heard Mr. Crête correctly, he was suggesting 30 minutes. Maybe there's room to consider extending the 15 minutes to 20 to protect that, *pour protéger ces 15 minutes*, to extend it to 20 minutes so that we actually get 15 minutes for the motion. Maybe that's a simple compromise that could be discussed at the steering committee. Maybe you could just extend it.

I think 30 minutes is a little severe, in my view. I would suggest that we move on. I think we've heard most of our arguments.

The Chair: Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: In terms of decorum, there might be an argument to have it at the beginning so people would perhaps behave a little more appropriately when company's around. That's just a theory.

As we look at this issue, it sounds like we need to kick it around a bit more. I will simply observe that I have all the standards for all the committees here. I simply note that every other committee seems to have the notice as 48 hours. There are a couple of committees that have different timelines, but they just advance the business to the next meeting. When you look at that, you say, well, how is it that other committees do it? You could argue that they don't go far, either.

Maybe we should kick it around more and come up with an idea that would help. I'd just like to try something, because I have found it frustrating. I don't disagree with Bob about trying to get work done on the one hand, but on the other, you still want motions to get forwarded as well.

We can always look at these and bring them back, no? To change the—

• (1650)

The Chair: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Maybe we should consider deferring this.

The Chair: Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry: It's very nice when it's written like this, but just to say what Mr. Lunney pinpointed before, it's *pratico pratique*. If you start at the beginning, it's not gracious. Most of the time the discussion for motions is not gracious at all.

The problem we have to face is quite easy. You're going to get a dozen motions, and until the first one is finished, you're never going to go to the second one, or the third one. That happened before. At that time, we just lose more time. You could come out, or Paul could come out, or any one of us could come out with a motion, and because the first one has not been dealt with totally, things are just postponed and postponed, and we achieve nothing.

I'll leave it like it is right now. The standing committee is going to meet, and we could come up with having 30 minutes or one hour just on motions, I think, because with a group it's just impossible to achieve anything in 15 minutes. That's the way I feel. I think we should leave it as it is for the moment. We can live with this, but it needs to be done at the end. The most important thing is that when we have witnesses, if it's 9 to 11, then in the last hour there should not be more than two witnesses, because at that time, you see, we're just completely finished.

The Chair: As you know, too, people will put motions on the order paper, but then they're in no rush to call them forward to be dealt with. They want them there. They may want to have the timing somewhere down the road. But if we know that there are motions that people want to deal with right away, then that would give us that opportunity.

Mr. Obhrai, on this question.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I've been on this committee for a long time. This committee, the motions, and everything is very complex, and every issue is a very complex issue, so we just cannot put in one little thing and say extend it.

I agree with Bernard on that, too. We should leave it at 15 minutes. In the past it has worked to some degree and it has not worked to some degree. Again, whatever you do it will work to some degree and it will not work to some degree. I think at the end of the day, when the steering committee meets, it can then decide for itself whether there have been too many motions that have not been discussed and maybe put in more time. But that is something that we will do as we progress ahead. It has worked, when we have done this thing, so I would agree with Bernard to leave it as it is right now.

The Chair: My question is to Mr. Crête.

When we were discussing the time, you spoke of 30 minutes. Did you move an amendment to make it 30 minutes, or was that just part of the discussion?

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête: I did not move an amendment, but if the committee wishes, I am prepared to discuss one. It was not a formal amendment.

[English]

The Chair: It seems to me as though we have a bit of...I wouldn't say complete consensus, but I think the majority of people suggest keeping it as it is. Let's deal with this at steering committee. If we find that we do not have enough time at steering committee, we may re-evaluate this motion. Is that fair?

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête: Yes, but let us vote.

[English]

The Chair: For the vote, we'll vote on it as presented.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête: Ask who is in favour of the motion and who is against.

[English]

The Chair: That's why I wanted to make sure he didn't move an amendment that we had to deal with first.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: This is the final motion, I believe. This is about the subcommittee. This motion is that pursuant to Standing Orders 108 (1) and 108(2), a subcommittee on international human rights be chaired by a member elected by the subcommittee, be established to inquire into matters relating to the promotion of respect for international human rights, as may be referred to it by the committee; that the subcommittee be composed of seven members or associate members, of which three shall be government members and two shall be Liberal members, one shall be from the Bloc Québécois and one from the New Democratic Party, to be named following the usual consultations with the whips; and that the subcommittee be empowered to send for persons, papers, and records, to receive evidence, to sit during a time when the committee is not sitting in Ottawa, to sit when the committee is sitting outside the parliamentary precinct, and to sit during periods when the House stands adjourned, and the chair of the subcommittee meet with the steering committee of the foreign affairs committee at their mutual discretion.

• (1655)

Mr. James Lunney: I so move.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

All in favour?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: On a point of clarification, Mr. Chair, does this reflect the composition?

Hon. Jim Abbott: Yes.

The Chair: It's the same as before the—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: In the last Parliament we were fewer. They had more. Now we have more and they are fewer. I want to make sure this reflects the composition of the House of Commons. That's all.

The Chair: What you're basically asking is that the committee be expanded. It's designed to be a small committee. In itself, this committee has worked very well. There have been, as you know, some questions about the studies they undertake, but this is giving them autonomy to do that. I think we've had those discussions in other parliaments.

Unless I hear an amendment, are you ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: All right, folks, unless there's anything else, as you know, our regular times are Mondays from 3:30 to 5:30 and Wednesdays from 3:30 to 5:30. Does the committee want to meet on Wednesday or would you rather have the steering committee meet during that time?

Hon. Bob Rae: I would suggest that the steering committee meet on Wednesday. Obviously the caucuses will give some direction to the steering committee members as to what they think the focus of the committee should be. I think it's better to have that discussion in the steering committee before we have a meeting.

Mr. Bernard Patry: Where do we stand with the Afghanistan report?

An hon. member: Is that out?

The Chair: That's a good question. My understanding is that the Afghanistan report was filed this summer, asking for a government response. I think that is the part that dies when Parliament is dissolved and you go into an election.

Hon. Bob Rae: Can we resubmit it?

The Chair: Yes. That would be something we would have to discuss. The answer is yes.

Hon. Bob Rae: Okay. We have a couple of things to deal with in old business.

The Chair: The answer to that is yes.

Mr. Dewar, then Mr. Crête.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I just wanted to see if somehow through the committee we could send a letter of thanks to Gerry for his work on this committee. How long was he working for this committee?

I think it would be appropriate. Gerry has worked for over 25 years for this committee. I assume that he's not coming back, but I don't know. If he's not coming back, I think it would be appropriate if we were able to send a card and an appropriate gift.

The Chair: We don't have a budget for gifts like that.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I don't care. I'll kick in some money. I just thought that for someone who has worked for 25 years as a public servant on this committee we should—

The Chair: How about if we send him a letter or card of appreciation? We encourage each one of you, if you want to get him a little something, to do that, unless you want to collect some money and our clerk can pool what's given and we can find him something.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Maybe at steering we could do something.

The Chair: That sounds good. Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Crête.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: If the steering committee sits on Wednesday, does that mean that it will bring proposals to the full committee next Monday and that we will only start working on the files themselves after that?

[*English*]

The Chair: It will come back here, so maybe what we should say is that Monday would be for committee business, with the report from the steering committee, and we would go from there.

Johanne.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: My question is perhaps more for the clerk. Someone mentioned the Afghanistan report. Perhaps I am not grasping everything. Is it possible to find out what stage we are at? For example, the subcommittee reports or the study on Omar Khadr that were done last time, are they still in the works? Did some of those reports fall by the wayside because the House was prorogued?

The Clerk: All reports go onto the committees' website. But everything stopped when the House was dissolved last September, even if the committee received no reply from the government. If the committee wants a reply from the government, it will have to ask.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: So I can find the reports on the site?

The Clerk: No, there are no reports, but the committee proceedings are there.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Would it be possible to find out the stage all our work got to, just to refresh our memories?

● (1700)

[*English*]

The Chair: The steering committee will deal with that.

As well, there may have been some reports from the subcommittee given here that we had sent back and that are now ready to be presented again. I don't know how that's going to work, but that's something we'll figure out at the steering committee. We'll get back to you. Again, as our clerk stated, all those reports that were filed are on the foreign affairs committee website.

Are we ready to adjourn?

We are adjourned.

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