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Thursday, February 5, 2009

—
Chair

Mrs. Joy Smith

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•(1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC)): Welcome, everybody.

My name is Joy Smith, member of Parliament, and I look forward to knowing all of you on an individual basis. I want to thank all the members on the committee for electing me as the chair. My apologies for not being here last week, but thank you for the confidence you've shown.

Mr. Carrie

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Could I raise a point of order?

We had some discussions when you weren't here about having the minister and officials appear. I just want to clarify that we agreed that the minister and officials would be here on Tuesday next week.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): We said we would like two days. The minister could choose which day to come, and we would have officials on the other day.

The Chair: Okay, I'll get back to that.

Before I start I want to lay down some expectations we had last year that might be very helpful this year.

I am very strict on time. I try to be extremely fair. I would ask that you raise your hand if you want to speak, because we don't want to go into this dialogue back and forth.

I'm really looking forward to the wonderful things we can do in this committee as a group. It's going to be a fantastic committee; it certainly was last year. When I look around and see the people who are on this committee, I am really buoyed by the fact that we have a lot of expertise around the table.

I understand that the minister has agreed to appear next Tuesday for an hour, as well as departmental and agency officials.

Are there any questions?

Dr. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: An hour is a very short amount of time to spend on all of this money, so if we have a two-hour meeting, would the officials stay for the other hour?

The Chair: My understanding is that they would.

Is that right, Mr. Carrie?

Yes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: The agreement on Tuesday was that we would do estimates for two days next week.

The Chair: That's right.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: So the officials will come on Thursday for a full two hours. Does that include Dr. Butler-Jones, Elinor Wilson, and the people from the agencies?

The Chair: Mr. Carrie, can you give a response to that?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Yes, thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I apologize if there is any misinterpretation of what we spoke about at the last meeting. I mentioned it, pending the minister's schedule to get her here. I believe there was agreement with the House leaders to get things done before Wednesday. On having the minister and the officials here, I have not confirmed who exactly will be attending, and we haven't confirmed anything for Thursday. My apologies, but I can move forward to see if we can get the officials here by Thursday.

The Chair: Great. Thank you, Mr. Carrie.

Dr. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's great that the minister will be here for the first hour and the officials will stay for the second hour.

I guess people like Dr. Butler-Jones and Dr. Wilson will be included in the group that can stay after.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I'll see if I can clarify that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It would be very helpful for us to be able to do that.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Yes.

The Chair: We will get that clarified and make sure all the committee members know.

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): It would be great if we could come back to this at the end of the meeting.

When I moved the motion the other day, it was with the hope that we would have at least two full meetings on estimates.

•(1540)

The Chair: We are going to do that.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: My understanding is that the House needs unanimous consent to have the estimates go through by Wednesday. I don't know of that unanimous consent being given yet. So I will also try to get an answer from my House leader in the interim.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Carrie, has the House given unanimous consent for the estimates yet?

Mr. Colin Carrie: I don't think so.

The Chair: Thank you so much. We'll get that sorted out.

With your permission, we'll go through with routine proceedings.

I visited with people in each of the parties—Dr. Bennett, Ms. Wasylycia-Leis—and we had a list of routine motions. I wanted you to be able to look over them prior to this meeting today. We're going to go through them one by one.

I've asked that you have the two versions and that they be distributed. One version is the common routine motions at opening of a session and the other a copy of the motions adopted by the health committee in the last session, so we can compare and contrast what we want to do.

Taking a look at the first routine motion, we have services of analysts from the Library of Parliament. The suggestion is:

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 it in its work.

That's the same as last year.

Will you move that?

Ms. Davidson moves it.

Is there a seconder?

Yes, Ms. Wasylycia-Leis

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Just for information, you're moving it the way we used to have it, as opposed to the new version you circulated.

The Chair: They're both the same.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: They're not, actually. The second one has the sentence, "These services may be requested at the discretion of the chair", pulled out and added at the end, which I think gives it a slightly different meaning.

The Chair: I'm sorry, I missed that.

Can I read it out then?

Last year we had:

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 it in its work.

This new one is:

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 it in its work.

What am I missing here? How is it different?

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis, can you point out the differences, please?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: My guess would be that if someone felt the need to rewrite it, then there's something I'm missing. I think, therefore, it would make sense to go back to the original, since we know that works.

The Chair: I see, it actually makes it three versions. I handed you one out last week and I thought this was going to be the same. This is proposals, yes.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: I would move the original.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): I moved it and that's the one I moved.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Davidson.

Who is it seconded by?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: I'll second it.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Second is the subcommittee on agenda and procedure:

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.

I believe that's the same as you have here in the routine motions.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I would like to propose an amendment to that, Madam Chair.

What I found on another committee that I did work on was that by having it this way the chair cannot maintain her impartiality. I was going to recommend this wording:

That the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be composed of the chair...

That would be you, the parliamentary secretary, and I could bring forward the government position.

The Chair: Just continue and then we'll have discussion.

Mr. Colin Carrie: To continue:

...a member from the government and a member from each of the opposition parties; that we have a quorum at the subcommittee that shall consist of at least three members, one of whom must be from the government and the other member from the opposition. Each member of the subcommittee shall be permitted to have one assistant attend at any meetings of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

● (1545)

The Chair: Just to stop here, if you recall last week, I know I handed this out to you, Dr. Bennett, Ms. Wasylycia-Leis, and to the Bloc, Mr. Malo, as a possibility that this might be presented from our side today. I wanted you to have a chance to think it over. What we're doing today is having the routine motions of the opening of a session. We have the ones we had last year, and then I handed these out so you folks would not be surprised when these came up in front of you today.

Does that clarify it for you a little bit?

Yes, Ms. Murray.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): What is the difference between the ones you had last year and the other routine motions? Are they identical, or do we need to be inspecting for slight language changes?

The Chair: For the most part, they're identical. Yes, we just go through them one by one. The only thing that I know we had talked about—and I know everybody has talked about these routine motions; I just wanted you to know what we had put forward, and I gave it to Dr. Bennett for discussion—

Ms. Joyce Murray: I understand this is the third one. I'm trying to find out if there is any difference between the other two. If not—

The Chair: We're going through one by one. I don't think there is any difference, is there, between the two?

They're all the same. Maybe what we could do to shorten this is—they're the same as they were last year, but I'd like to go through them one by one because I did hand out this other option as well, and it's up for grabs also. So let's go back to the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Thank you.

I understand Colin's amendment. I would like to speak strongly against it. We've had long discussions at this committee and others about the role of the parliamentary secretary. Some of us would like to see the parliamentary secretary not on the committee, period, because we think it should be a committee that is independent of the minister, and we're advising the government and the minister. So I would react very negatively and strongly against your amendment and suggest that we leave it as is.

I don't have a problem with the third part that you propose, which is that each member should have one staff person present, but I would strongly urge that either you withdraw the middle part or we vote against it.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Thank you very much.

One of the reasons I think the statement that the quorum of the subcommittee shall consist of at least three members is important is that this subcommittee is going to direct what the committee is going to be looking at over the upcoming months. If for any reason a member of one of the parties can't show up—it could be a flight reason—you could have one or two parties making a direction for the committee. The recommendation here would be that the government, or one or two parties, wouldn't be able to direct it and that we would have one member, at least from the majority of the parties, on that subcommittee so we could discuss it, if that makes sense to you.

The Chair: Mr. Malo, you're next, and then Dr. Bennett after Mr. Malo.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): I just want to draw my colleagues' attention to this. When a member of a political party is not at the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, we often find that, at the full committee, everything has to be redone because his party has not been consulted and he does not agree with the direction that the workplan is taking. Then we never hear the end of it.

Since there are only four parties, we can surely find the time to get all four around a table to discuss the agenda. The motion as previously drafted accommodates all political parties. In the last Parliament, the motion as presently written caused no problem. So I would keep it in its present form.

• (1550)

[*English*]

The Chair: Dr. Bennett.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I agree.

[*English*]

I think one of the problems is that the role of the steering committee is only for planning. It's not for directing anything. It's to have a bit more time to distill a whole bunch of things into a few suggestions for this committee, but nothing is decided at the steering committee that isn't ratified by the full committee.

I, like Judy, have worried, including when I was at backbench on the government side, about the role of the parliamentary secretary on parliamentary committees, in that it skews the power differential in a way that a lot of us would like reversed to the days when the parliamentary secretary didn't sit on committees. I think it would be really inappropriate for the parliamentary secretary to be on the steering committee. I think it did work well last year.

I think, as honourable members, the steering committee is no place for anybody who's trying to ram anything through. This is a place where we try to make the work of the main committee a little bit tidier and more organized. I think it worked well. As you know, with all the routine motions, if it's not working or if there's been a problem, we would certainly be open to having a conversation about it again, but at the moment I think it's better that it stays the way it is.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I would like to speak to two points.

I agree on the point of the subcommittee having input from everyone. My point is this. Why have a subcommittee if people aren't going to attend and participate?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: They do.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Well, that's very good. From the experience on my other committees, sometimes one or two parties wouldn't show up, and then—

The Chair: Mr. Carrie, I will intercede here, because I have to say that last year every member showed up and it worked really, really well.

You know, you have different experiences in different committees.

Mr. Colin Carrie: That's where I'm coming from.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Colin Carrie: But it worked very well because everybody was there.

On the other point about not having the parliamentary secretary, in the first paragraph of what we're suggesting here, the subcommittee would be comprised of the chair and, if not the parliamentary secretary, someone from the government side, because we would like to maintain the chair's impartiality.

I will read the Standing Committee of Public Accounts minutes. Mr. Christopherson made some statements that I think make a lot of sense. He said:

So as the chair now is playing gatekeeper to us getting the floor, that's what he or she does at subcommittee, at the steering committee.

The chair is not, in my experience, recognized as the lead person for any of the caucuses. It's always somebody else.

So I was going to make a suggestion that we allow a member from the chair's party to be at the steering committee. ... The chair is non-partisan...

He also says:

...the Liberals really haven't been represented from a political point of view...

He gets a bit partisan there.

I'd like to propose that we maintain the impartiality of the chair. If we have the chair arguing for one of the caucuses, I think that takes away from the impartiality we'd like to see the chair maintain, and that I know she has maintained in the past.

I think it's a valid suggestion, and I welcome your input.

The Chair: Discussion?

Dr. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: In my experience at steering committee, it's more of a conversation than a formal chaired meeting. I think it's been a place where people express their priorities and preferences of how we go forward, and it has been a place where things are developed by consensus, not by votes and how many people are in the room.

I think we have tried very hard, with the chair's leadership, to keep this committee as non-partisan as possible. To develop work plans and as many things as we can by consensus, without a vote, even at the full committee, is a better way of going forward.

There aren't any other committees where there are two members of the government side on the steering committee. It's not that this really matters. What matters is what's working for us or not.

With the chair's advice, let's see how it goes in the other way. If there seem to be problems, we'll address them then. But if it's not broken, let's not try to fix it.

• (1555)

The Chair: Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Thank you.

I have to disagree with just about everything you're saying, Carrie. I think we have to differentiate the role of the chair when he or she chairs a meeting. They must do so objectively and as impartially as possible. But the chair is also here representing the Conservative government. In a few committees they represent another party, but she wears that hat.

When you get to the steering committee, which is a collegial kind of discussion group around what parties are bringing to the agenda

and how to prioritize that, as the chair and as the Conservative member on that subcommittee, she represents your interests. Presumably you've had discussions, and she brings that to the table. Just like me—I'm now an associate vice-chair; I am still the only NDP member going to that subcommittee. I'm going to argue for what I advocate and what my party wants, and we're going to work it out.

I think it doesn't make sense to complicate the picture at all. We're a collegial group. We can work it out and see how it goes. I'd suggest that we go back to the original.

The Chair: Might I just make a comment here?

I've prided myself on being impartial. I've tried to be really, really fair and to work with everybody, and I don't wear my party hat in this committee at all.

Now, last year, the subcommittee worked really, really well. At the subcommittee, I did push the government's agenda, because it wasn't really a formal meeting, as Dr. Bennett has pointed out, and because we had to bring everything that we did back to committee. That's when the fisticuffs sometimes went on, because we really argued it, very, very clearly.

But I think there's some merit to.... Just from my point of view, I would like to be so separated from pushing anything. If I might provide some input here, I really think there's some merit in having members from each party, including the government side, because I would not like to be involved. You know what I mean?

It worked last year, but whatever the committee decides.... I'm just saying that I want it to run really smoothly and I don't want to be wearing a partisan hat at all in this committee.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Chair, I am new to this committee, but did you actually chair that committee?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Colin Carrie: So you were a chair and then you also argued the government's side?

The Chair: Yes, I did. They allowed me to do that.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Do you know what, Judy? I see your point, but I think one of your members in another committee did see our point.

I think we've heard from the chair, and she has said it may even improve.... We've all said that we'd like the chair to be as impartial as possible, and she has stated that it may even help her to maintain that impartiality better, because if there's something argued in subcommittee, then it comes back to the full committee. If she has taken a position one way or another previously at a subcommittee, then there has been a slant put on that impartiality.

Ultimately, the vote of the committee is what the committee does, but I do see this as a positive addition to the routine motions.

The Chair: Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: I just want to say, first of all, that I know you were quoting David Christopherson. I don't always agree with him, so this may be one of those times.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: I don't think we should fix one problem and in the process create another one. I think what we'd lose is the sense of all of us being equal when coming to the table to have a discussion. If it's hard for the chair to be both the chair at those meetings and to provide input from her party, then I think we can rotate the chair. There are all kinds of ways we can deal with that.

But really, in effect, we don't end up making definite decisions. We bring some recommendations to the committee that we've worked out, based on the schedule, and then we battle it out at the full committee. So then she can put on her chair's hat, and we'll keep fighting.

The Chair: And we have the experience, too, of it working well the last time.

Ms. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): On a point of order, we have the motion and the suggested amendments, so could you clarify what the suggested amendments are? I think we've had about two suggested amendments, so I'm not quite sure which is what.

The Chair: Mr. Carrie, do you want to speak to that?

Mr. Colin Carrie: What I did is I read out an alternative to the second routine motion on the subcommittee on agenda and procedure, which we all have.

It is my understanding that the opposition is okay with having:

Each member of the subcommittee shall be permitted to have one assistant attend at any meeting of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

Is that correct?

Dr. Bennett, would that be agreeable to you?

•(1600)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Say that again.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I think that's the part, Judy, that you said you would agree to, that each member would have a staff assistant.

The Chair: Can I just read the whole thing out, so there's no confusion?

It reads:

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.

So what we had for the opening of our session is no different from what we had last year.

In addition, what Mr. Carrie is saying is:

That each member of the subcommittee shall be permitted to have one assistant attend at any meeting of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

So that's what we're talking about right now.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Carrie is presenting three changes. Number one, he is suggesting that the makeup of the subcommittee be changed by adding the parliamentary secretary. That makes it—

Mr. Colin Carrie: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...parliamentary secretary. The idea, Judy, would be to allow the chair to remain impartial.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: I know that; I'm arguing against it. You're talking about having five members on the subcommittee, one of whom is a chair and another a parliamentary secretary from your side. That would destroy the balance of the subcommittee. That would destroy the nature and purpose of this steering committee, and I vehemently disagree with it.

I also disagree with your second amendment, which is the establishment of a quorum requiring that one member be present from the government and one from the opposition. That totally skews the makeup of our decision-making process, and it is not acceptable.

The only thing I could agree with is that if you want to limit the number of staff who come to subcommittees, I don't care. I only have one anyway.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: That being said, Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I think I understand what you're saying, but again, my experience from another committee is that we actually did make decisions in the subcommittee. On what I was proposing, the opposition would outvote us three to one or three to two, so you would still have the say on that. What it does, though, I would suggest, is save our actual committee time to do the committee work.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We don't vote.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Then you know what? That's fine. The committee operated a little differently. We were able to make some decisions at the subcommittee. It was very time efficient. It didn't take up the time of the full committee.

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Colin Carrie: No? That's okay.

The Chair: With your permission, having heard that, can I read out what we can vote on right now? Just from listening to what you're saying, I'm hoping I have it right. If I haven't, correct me. I think we are going to vote on only this:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of the Chair, the two Vice-Chairs and a member of the opposition party; each member of the subcommittee shall be permitted to have one assistant attend at any of the meetings of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure.

That is the only thing we're voting on.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you. That's the same as last year's. The only thing that's changed is that we can bring a staffer.

On reduced quorum, we had the same motion last year and the year before. I'll read it out:

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 (3) members are present, including one member of the opposition.

Mr. Carrie, you had another reduced quorum suggestion, which I handed out to everybody. Do you want to read that out? There was a change.

Mr. Colin Carrie: There was. 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 four (4) members are present—

—so instead of three, there would be four, and it continues—

—including one member from each recognized party. In the case of previously scheduled meetings taking place outside the parliamentary precinct, the committee members in attendance shall only be required to wait for 15 minutes following the designated start of the meeting before they may proceed to hear witnesses and receive evidence, regardless of whether opposition or government members are present.

● (1605)

The Chair: Dr. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I normally would agree with this, but I'm afraid that the behaviour last year was so appalling at other committees that I am not prepared to give any party a veto, which is, in effect, that if they don't show up, it doesn't happen and there's no quorum.

This is a group. Hopefully, we are all looking after the best interests of the public good, but we can't have one party decide that they don't like the witnesses who are coming, or they don't like the activity that's going on, and then in effect veto the meeting by not showing up. I'm afraid I think it should stay where it was, at three members.

The Chair: Is there any other discussion?

Mrs. Wasylycia-Leis.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Sorry, I can't support it, and I couldn't support it under any circumstances, whether or not there was good behaviour last year, because in fact it has a couple of ramifications. The most serious from my point of view is that as a single member on this committee, I juggle House duty and committee duty, I go out to do some media or go to the bathroom or whatever, quorum isn't maintained, and I'm the one to blame.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Cloning: we banned it.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Yes.

So just on that basis alone it doesn't make sense.

I also think it could become leverage. It could become a lever by the government to say that if you don't like something that's happening, you just decide not to attend, and then we can't proceed. That happened to us sometimes last year, right? I think we would be well served just to maintain it as is.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I've heard the viewpoint of the opposition, and if that's the way we want to move ahead...

If there are travel issues, or anything along those lines, and we have witnesses and people can't make it, we could still hold meetings and things like that, no problem.

The Chair: Yes.

I think what has coloured us, in a sense, with this whole committee is that we had an excellent, smooth-running committee last year, so we're trying to prevent bad things from happening.

Right now we're voting on the reduced quorum. I'll read it out:

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 (3) members are present, including one member of the opposition.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Distribution of documents is the same as we had the year before:

That only the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the Committee and only when such documents exist in both official languages.

I've distributed the sheet, Mr. Carrie, if you want to speak to this. There is an addition to present to committee.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I think this would strengthen it, and I welcome the opposition's input:

That only the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to distribute to the members of the Committee any documents, including motions, and that all documents which are to be distributed among the committee members must be in both official languages, and that the clerk shall advise all witnesses appearing before committee of this requirement.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Mrs. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I think the amendment makes sense. I know a couple of times last year we ran into problems when witnesses had brought documents, thinking they could distribute them, and were not able to because they were not in both official languages. Making sure that all witnesses are advised of this is a good idea.

The Chair: Is there further discussion?

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: I agree with the change generally. The only concern I have is that you're adding the words "including motions" to this distribution issue. There are times when something happens and a member wants to bring a motion forward. We have full translation services, and it should be allowed. So I suggest as a friendly amendment that we delete the words, "including motions".

● (1610)

The Chair: Is there further discussion?

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I think it is important to have the motions properly translated and written. Sometimes even when bills are written, even though the language may be perhaps correct in translation, there may be a finesse or a slightly different meaning in one language compared to the other. Since some members here aren't fluently bilingual, I think it is important that they're able to get an opinion on the two languages from a translator they know well.

I don't think this is harmful at all. With respect, it would help all members who perhaps do not have full bilingual capacity to understand motions and the finesse and slight differentiations between the languages. So I think it is a good idea.

The Chair: I have to make a point here. The clerk has informed me that all documents that are distributed are distributed by the clerk, whether they are motions or anything else. The difference is that they have to be in both official languages.

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis is next, and then Mr. Malo.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: I think you would hamstring the ability of this committee to function. None of us could, for any reason, make a motion to move to a different order of business, adjourn for five minutes, or whatever. It would totally incapacitate us.

If members want to argue that this wouldn't be covered under the words "including motions", what would be included is a member coming to this committee with a new crisis developing and wanting to just bring the motion to the committee in an emergency. That would be prevented. So I think we would have less ability to bring forward motions, as has been our practice all along on a regular basis. They are always translated because we have full translation services.

The Chair: The clerk has informed me that the motion can be submitted to the clerk, and then it has to be translated, and then he'll distribute it.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: I know that. That's my point. It takes away our flexibility to bring a motion until we've had it translated, at which time the meeting is over and we're done.

The Chair: Monsieur Malo.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: In the interests of clarity, how does the clerk see the argument put forward by Ms. Wasylycia-Leis? When we are debating something here and someone wants to make a motion, can it be debated right away if the translator translates it? Is that how you interpret what she was saying?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Georges Etoka): The member is not required to introduce the motion in both languages. He can introduce it in his own language and the clerk is required to translate it before it is distributed. But if, during a committee session, the debate is that the committee adjourn, the motion cannot be debated. It can be introduced in the member's own language and the interpretation service translates it into the other language.

Mr. Luc Malo: What Mr. Carrie is proposing is that, when a motion is presented in advance, it be in both languages.

[English]

The Chair: Would you like to speak to that?

[Translation]

The Clerk: Yes. A member giving advance notice of a motion is not required to provide it in the other language. It is presented in the member's own language and then translated before being distributed. It is accepted, but it must be translated and available in both languages before being distributed to committee members.

Mr. Luc Malo: Is that the current practice?

• (1615)

[English]

The Clerk: That's correct.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: That is fine.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I was just wondering about the clerk's opinion. Through you, is he saying that he sees "including motions" as being redundant? Is that what you feel?

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Okay.

The Chair: Mrs. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Actually my question was answered. It was the same thing Mr. Malo just asked.

The Chair: Okay.

Are we prepared to vote on this motion?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: May I just ask a question for clarification?

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: You're leaving the words "including motions" in?

The Chair: No, we're taking them out.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: You're taking them out?

The Chair: Yes.

I will read it to you right now. This is the motion that we're discussing right now:

That only the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to distribute to the members of the Committee any documents and that all documents which are to be distributed amongst the Committee members must be in both official languages. The Clerk shall advise all witnesses appearing before the Committee of this requirement.

That is the responsibility of the clerk. That is what we are voting on.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

Working meals.

Last year I promised to bake cookies and you never got them, and you're not going to get them this year. Having said that, we had a grandiose conversation about health foods and everything because we're the health committee. So I give Georges my complete congratulations and thank him because you will notice behind me that there is a healthy display, and I would assume that all members, at some point in time, would go up and get some delicious fruit, cheese, healthy biscuits and crackers.

Now I want to go to the working meals. By the way, the clerk and I have discussed this healthy meal thing, so I hope you're not going to bring anything else up because last year it wasted a lot of our time.

That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the Committee and its Subcommittees.

This is at a cost of how much? I'm a math and science person so I need to know the cost.

Last year it was \$50 a meal. The healthy foods are a little bit more expensive, but worth it because you're all worth it. Today's bill was \$76 approximately.

That's what we're voting on.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: There are a couple of motions I'd like to discuss afterwards, in addition to that, if that would be okay.

The Chair: Does it have to do with working meals?

Mr. Colin Carrie: No, this is in addition, if that's all right.

The Chair: Of course.

So let's deal with the working meals first.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I have an amendment as well for the working meals, if that's okay.

The Chair: Oh, do you have an amendment?

Mr. Colin Carrie: I do, of course.

The Chair: I knew there'd be somebody with an amendment. I didn't get away with this today.

Go ahead, Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: What I would like to suggest is that the committee hereby authorize the clerk of the committee, in consultation with the chair, to make the necessary arrangements to provide for working meals as may be required, and that the cost of these meals be charged to the committee budget.

The Chair: They are automatically, anyway. It comes out of the working committee budget.

I fully trust him. He doesn't really need to consult with me, as long as you like the eats, everybody. We've consulted for half an hour.

Is there any discussion on this?

We'll go to Monsieur Malo.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would just like to know if you feel that a normal meeting of the committee, scheduled between 3:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m., would include a working meal. I feel that a working meal happens at normal meal times, not necessarily between 3:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.

[*English*]

The Chair: To clarify, you are debating the title of this food so as to change it from working meals to what, Monsieur Malo?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: It is current practice to serve food during normal committee meetings. I just want to know if you approved that under the heading "Working Meals", Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Well, we as a committee are deciding it today. If you want a change, now's the time to do it.

Go ahead, Dr. Bennett.

• (1620)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I agree with Luc that the working meal is usually a special thing done when we decide to have extra guests, and it really is at the discretion of the chair. I don't think we're talking about the coffee and fruit and whatever.

So the working meals resolution concerns long meetings or something, such as clause-by-clause and that kind of thing, when you have the right to order some sort of wonderful meal.

The Chair: So what should we call this? Should we include working meals and snacks? Is that okay? It is working meals and snacks. So may I read this out now?

That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals and snacks for the Committee and its subcommittees.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Carrie, we'll go to witnesses' expenses, and then we'll come back to yours.

I'll read it out:

That if requested, reasonable travel accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses, not exceeding two representatives per organization; and that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the Chair.

That's exactly what we had last year.

Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

On staff at in camera meetings:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff person at an in camera meeting.

Mr. Carrie, do you want to speak to staff at in camera meetings, which is on the sheet that was handed out to committee?

Mr. Colin Carrie: I would like a slight wording change. It gets rid of "unless otherwise ordered". It just says that each committee member in attendance shall be permitted to have one staff member attend any in camera meetings and that in addition, each party shall be permitted to have one party staff member attend the in camera meetings. I don't think that is—

The Chair: Is "unless otherwise ordered" what you wanted to add to that? No?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Yes, I'm just taking out "That, unless otherwise ordered".

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: It adds the party staff member.

The Chair: Would you like to—

Mr. Colin Carrie: It says "one staff member designated from the respective parties", if you look at number eight, Pat. I think we had that before, and "one representative from the whip's office" was in brackets.

The Chair: Do you want to read that out, Mr. Carrie?

Mr. Colin Carrie: My apologies, but the old way, the one that was adopted last time, I believe, said:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff person from his or her office; and in addition one staff member designated from the respective parties (i.e. one representative from the Whip's office) at in camera meetings.

I was saying we'd just say, "each committee member in attendance shall be permitted to have one staff member attend at any in camera meeting", which I think is the same thing. It gets rid of "from his or her office", and adds "in addition, each party shall be permitted to have one party staff member". It doesn't necessarily designate who. It has an example here—one representative from the whip's office. It's slightly different wording.

The Chair: Can I read it out again, Mr. Carrie?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Sure.

The Chair: So it would read:

Each committee member in attendance shall be permitted to have one staff member attend at any in camera meeting; in addition, each party shall be permitted to have one party staff member attend in camera meetings.

Is that correct?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Right.

The Chair: Okay, is there discussion?

Ms. Murray.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Maybe I missed something, but I'm not clear what the difference is from the previous way of describing staff at in camera meetings.

Mr. Colin Carrie: There's not much of a difference.

The Chair: There's not much of a difference. What he's adding is, "each party shall be permitted to have one party staff member attend in camera meetings". Would you like me to read them both out again?

Last year we had:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff person at an in camera meeting.

What Mr. Carrie is suggesting is, "in addition, each party shall be permitted to have one party staff member attend in camera meetings".

Is that right, Mr. Carrie? Whip staff is what it is, right?

Okay, is there discussion?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

• (1625)

The Chair: Okay, let's go on to in camera meeting transcripts. The motion states:

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.

That was the same...well, it's slightly different. The year before we had that one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting was to be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation of the committee. The change this time is that it says, "by members of the committee". It means the same thing.

Are you in agreement with that one? Is there any discussion?

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I would like to propose a slight change here, but it is significant. It's to say that in camera meetings be transcribed

and that the transcription be kept with the clerk of the committee for later consultation by members of Parliament, instead of members of the committee. What it allows is that if somebody isn't a member of the committee, they could still view those transcripts.

The Chair: Can I have the clerk speak to this one? There might be a problem here.

The Clerk: If I may, by saying "any member of Parliament", it means that a member who is not a member of the committee has access to in camera transcripts, which is not allowed by the rules. The committee would have to allow it.

The Chair: Traditionally or historically that has not happened, because we don't want to leak in camera problems.

So is it okay? We'll go back to the original one, which states 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.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next one is on notice of motions. It says:

That

—and I'll leave a blank for the number—

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.

Traditionally it has been 48 hours' notice. Can we have discussion on that? Do you agree that 48 hours' notice is what we want?

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Yes, that is reasonable.

The Chair: Is there any other discussion?

Ms. Murray.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Before we vote, I'd like to understand again what the difference is. Are we voting on the notice of motions the way it was handled in the previous Parliament's committee or on the proposal?

The Chair: We're filling in what it was from what we had previously.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Then we are voting on—

The Chair: I'll read it out again:

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

That's for notice of motions. This is new this year, Ms. Murray.

What we had last year when we were operating was very similar. It says:

That 48 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the Committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration; and that the notice of motion be filed with the Clerk of the Committee and distributed to members in both official languages; and that notice given on Friday be deemed to have been given on the following Monday.

That was last year's.

An hon. member: That's fine.

The Chair: That's fine? Let's have a discussion as to which one you would like to vote on, the one we had last year or the new one. Can I have a discussion on that?

Ms. Murray.

● (1630)

Ms. Joyce Murray: I have a question as to what the implication of taking that last phrase out is and why it provides a better operating procedure than what you were doing in the committee last time.

The Chair: Do you want to answer that, or do you want me to answer?

The Clerk: Putting in that a notice given on a Friday be deemed to have been given on the following Monday means that the clock doesn't start ticking on Friday, but starts ticking on Monday: the 48 hours, when it's given on a Friday, would normally start on a Monday. If I receive a notice, let's say, on Friday at 6 o'clock and members are already gone, I can only put out a notice to members' offices on the Monday morning. So the clock doesn't start ticking on the Friday.

The Chair: That's a very good question.

Mr. Carrie, do you want to speak to this one?

Mr. Colin Carrie: I think this is a good line to have in there for the sake of communications, because there are some members who actually leave on Thursday. They may be back in their constituency, and if a motion is put forward, the members may not get the communication until Monday morning anyway. This would give them the full 48 hours. I like the way it was done last year better.

The Chair: Yes, to tell you the truth, last year it worked very well. That's why we put it in last year: notice "given on Friday be deemed to have been given on the following Monday". It was for the reasons we're discussing right now. I don't really know why this was put in this way.

Dr. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I'm not sure about.... Does it say at what time on Friday?

The Chair: No, it is any time on Friday. Anything put in on Friday will be deemed to be in on Monday, because—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Well, no. If you get it in before 3:30 on Friday, you want to be able to vote on something on Tuesday. I think if something gets in early in the day on Friday, you don't want it put off until Monday, because then you can't vote on it on Tuesday. So I would say "before 3:30 on Friday"; that would be, in effect, 48 working hours.

The Chair: You are making an amendment to this saying that we should add in "before 3:30 on Friday"?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It should be "after 3:30".

The Chair: I'm sorry, "after 3:30 on Friday".

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I was just going to say that I was okay with how you had it last year. If you want to change it to a different....

The Chair: To be more precise, right? So may I read out the more precise one, so we're all in agreement and nobody comes back to me afterwards and says they didn't understand?

That 48 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the Committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration; and that the notice of motion be filed with the Clerk of the Committee and distributed to members in both official languages; and that notice given after 3:30 p.m. on Friday be deemed to be given on the following Monday.

So we'll put in "after 3:30".

Okay? All in agreement?

(Motion agreed to)

● (1635)

The Chair: Okay, we'll go on to.... What do we have next? Oh, yes, time limits for witness statements and questioning. Now this is what we had last time:

That the witnesses from any one organization shall be allowed ten (10) minutes to make their opening statement. During the questioning of witnesses, there shall be allocated seven (7) minutes for the first round of questioning and thereafter five (5) minutes shall be allocated to each questioner in the second and subsequent rounds of questioning. The order of questions for the first round of questioning shall be as follows: Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative (CPC). Questioning during subsequent rounds shall alternate between the opposition members and government members, in the following fashion: Liberal, CPC, Bloc, CPC, NDP, CPC, Liberal, CPC, Bloc, CPC, NDP, CPC, for so long as time allows.

That during the appearance of a Minister, the Chair direct the first fifteen (15) minutes to members of the Official Opposition, ten (10) minutes to the Bloc Québécois, ten (10) minutes to the New Democratic Party and ten (10) minutes to the Conservative Party during the first round of questioning; and that thereafter five (5) minutes per party be allocated alternating between the opposition and government members, at the discretion of the Chair.

Now here for this time, in speaking order, we have to.... Because this was time limits for witnesses' statements last year compiled with speaking order, there has been a change this year, because we have one more member, a Conservative member.

So having said that, the time limits.... I shouldn't have read out the time limits because they don't apply this year. I mean the speaking order, rather, doesn't apply this year because of the makeup of the committee. So the time limits for witnesses are ten minutes, seven minutes, five minutes, as they were last year, but the speaking order.... Listen carefully to this so you understand the speaking order and we can discuss it:

The order of questions for the first round of questioning should be as follows: Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative.

That allows for each member of each party to be able to ask a question and not be left out.

Questioning during the second round shall alternate between the 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 should 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.

So we want to make sure, before someone else speaks, that every member of every party gets a chance to speak.

By the way, there's food up here if anyone wants it.

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: First of all, I don't have a problem obviously with the reduced time being recommended. The seven minutes in the first round, I think, makes sense, and obviously I appreciate the fact that each party gets a chance in the first round.

I think the principle behind that has to be continued on into the other rounds. This is a committee that is based on party representation. All committees are based on party representation. It's not based on individual representation. The longstanding traditions of committees in the House of Commons have been to find the best way possible to have maximum participation without violating the principle of prorated questions based on party status.

So I'd have to speak as strongly as possible against the proposal for the second round. That goes against everything, I think, that we've tried to accomplish at this committee and other committees. It would obviously exclude me and exclude the NDP voice from most of the discussion. I think the way in which you achieve the goal—if that's your goal on your side, to have everyone speak—is to share the load, to share the time, to divvy up responsibilities without violating the principle of party representation.

The Chair: Can you give a suggestion, please, for what you would like to see the second round look like, Ms. Wasylycia-Leis?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: I think the idea would be what a couple of committees have done, which is to continue the four parties into the second round for five minutes. That would be my preference.

The Chair: In the same way that—

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: So you continue on—

The Chair: So Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative?

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative; Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative. That's been done in a number of committees. And then change it in your third round. I don't know how my colleagues in the Bloc and the Liberals feel, but if that's not acceptable, I think there are some other variations that at least get the NDP in the second round with five minutes, within five or six spots.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think the amendment is totally unacceptable. In a minority government, to think you move into a tennis match, opposition, government, opposition, government is really, frankly, outrageous.

Depending on the witnesses, quite often only two Liberals get to ask a question at lots of the hearings we've had, and we figure it out and we decide among ourselves. So it's not that everybody gets to ask a question in any one session, but over the period, usually during the week or whatever, everybody gets to do something. I agree with Judy that it's not about individuals, it's about the party representation. I felt very uncomfortable a number of times last year that Judy quite often only had one question the whole time, which just didn't seem quite right.

I think a compromise was wrestled to the ground this morning at official languages. I think there's a way of doing this that makes sense. I'd like to hear what Judy thinks would be fair.

• (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The way this works out, it does give each member the opportunity to ask their questions. To do what the honourable member from the NDP is suggesting would mean the Conservatives in the second round would only get one-quarter of the questioning, when the Conservative are almost 50% of the House. I ask the honourable member, Dr. Bennett, to remember when she was in a majority government; there was an equal representation, percentage-wise, with the Liberal representation, if you understand what I was saying.

To go to a second round with Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative would mean many Conservative members would not get an opportunity to ask a reasonable number of questions at every meeting.

So my solution would be to keep it this way, but in the third round give the NDP absolutely the first. Then if you're looking at the total number of questions, which I believe we can count here, it would still be, percentage-wise, equal to the representation in the House.

The Chair: So what we're looking at right now is this. The first suggestion has been that we just keep on from Ms. Wasylycia-Leis, we just keep on as we do with the first round: Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative. The second suggestion from Mr. Carrie is that because of the numbers in the House, we should have it outlined Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Conservative. Then in the third round have the NDP start, so NDP, Liberal or NDP, Bloc?

How did you see the third round, Mr. Carrie?

Mr. Colin Carrie: For questioning during the third round, we could do NDP, Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, because I honestly think we're not going to get an extended third round. If you look at the timelines, we're not going to get a lot of time in a third round, so that would mean ending up with the NDP first, then Liberal, Conservative, Bloc. The third round would get preference, with, of course, the NDP going first.

The Chair: Further discussion?

Ms. Murray.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Just to point out that after the first round, in which each party has an opportunity to question, in the second round this appears to me to be four Conservative questions out of seven, which certainly seems excessive.

The Chair: Who's next on the list?

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis, and then we'll go to Mr. Carrie.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: The way we've dealt with committees and rotations over the years is quite different from the way we handle question period in the House. You can't draw a parallel. I have now served off and on in the health committee for 12 years, and I can say that when the Liberals were in government there was a fair rotation. We were under pressure last time by the Conservatives to displace the NDP altogether and we managed to hold on to a semblance of a reasonable position, in the way it's now listed. I think it would be absolutely horrific and wrong for you to arbitrarily block out in effect two parties, but particularly the NDP, in a Parliament that is made up of four parties and at a time when we have a minority Parliament and when all parties are trying to work together and cooperate.

This, again I repeat, is not about individual members. It is up to you and your side of this table to figure out how to rotate your members. This isn't about giving everybody the same, equal amount of time. It's about advancing issues and pursuing them from the point of view of why we got elected, what ideological perspective we bring, and what background we have. To suddenly throw that out the window would be contrary to everything we know about parliamentary democracy and responsible government.

• (1645)

The Chair: Mrs. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Dr. Bennett referred to a solution that was arrived at in—the official languages committee, was it?

Do you know what it was?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: There was a compromise at the end. It wasn't exactly what they had done before, because this Parliament is different in terms of seats, but I think there was a compromise that... It got changed just at the last minute, I think.

In the official languages committee they have the first round of seven minutes, with official opposition, Bloc, NDP, government; the second round of five minutes, with the official opposition, Bloc, and then the government comes next, and then the Bloc—

The Chair: Can you read that out again, Dr. Bennett? I'm trying to write this down.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's the official opposition, government, Bloc Québécois, NDP. Then in the third round it goes official opposition, Bloc, government, NDP. They switch it, so that if you end up with your meeting shortened, the government has gotten something. A fourth round goes to official opposition, and then government, Bloc Québécois, NDP.

The Chair: I just want to be mindful of the fact that last year we got through two rounds barely. I can't remember, but I think once or twice we went to a third round—but it was rare.

One suggestion we're looking at now is that we go in the order of Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative, and do that consistently through all rounds. That came from Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

From Dr. Bennett...

I'm sorry. Mr. Carrie, my apologies; you were on the list.

Mr. Colin Carrie: If you could give me a moment here, I'm trying to come up with a good solution.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Colin Carrie: I'm sorry.

The Chair: I'm trying to figure this whole thing out, actually.

Mr. Colin Carrie: What I'm trying to do at the end of it... The way we're proposing it, the Conservatives had a little less than half, but maybe we can come up with a good compromise here too.

The Chair: Okay.

I think, Dr. Bennett, if I'm correct, what you said is that the first round is as we suggested.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes.

The Chair: The second round would be Bloc, Conservative, NDP, and Liberal.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No.

The Chair: No?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It would be Liberal... The official opposition goes first every time, but then in the second round the government goes second.

The Chair: Conservative—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Then the Bloc—

The Chair: —and then the Bloc and then the NDP. And that's for the second round.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes.

In the third round, it goes official opposition, Bloc, then government, and then NDP.

The Chair: Okay.

Now we're getting somewhere. We're starting to consolidate our thoughts. So to go over it again, this is what Dr. Bennett suggested.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Chair, I just think this works to the reality of our sometimes getting to only two rounds. Otherwise the arithmetic is sort of academic.

The Chair: So Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative. In the second round, Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, NDP. Then if we have a third round, Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, NDP.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I'm proposing that it counts out as the first round having four spots and each party getting one of those. In the second round, if we get that, the Liberals will end up having two, the Bloc will have two, and the Conservatives end up with two in that one together, which makes three out of eight that the Conservatives have. At the end of the round, at the end of what we're proposing right here, the Conservatives would get five out of eleven, which is a little less than half, which is how the House is set up. The Liberals would get three out of eleven, which is close proportionately. The Bloc would get two out of eleven and the NDP one. In the House the Bloc has almost double the number of seats of the NDP. So in your line, I believe you're proposing that the Bloc get the same as the NDP. I haven't had a chance to copy it down quickly.

• (1650)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: This is just official languages.

Mr. Colin Carrie: At the end of the day, doing it the way I'm suggesting, the Conservatives are still getting less than half of the questions in the two rounds, which, you said, most of the time we didn't get to. Because the Conservatives had the last two questions in the second round, if we don't get that round done, we're the ones who lose that proportionality.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You're never last.

Mr. Colin Carrie: If you look here at the first round, it's Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative. Then it says the second round would be Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, and then Conservative.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Well you're back to this one. This one's out.

The Chair: Order.

We have to take turns. I'll give you your turn.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: With the original proposal, Madam Bennett, if it doesn't go through the full two rounds, if you're looking at the percentage, the Conservatives would lose the last two spots, which means out of nine the Conservatives would get only three, which is less than one-third of the seats.

The Chair: Mr. Carrie, so you're saying to go back to Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative after that? What are you suggesting?

Mr. Colin Carrie: If we get to a third round, I would suggest the NDP go first.

The Chair: NDP, Liberal, Conservative, Bloc.

Mr. Colin Carrie: No, NDP, Liberal, Bloc, Conservative at a third round, if we get to the third round. But you're saying that rarely happens. The second round would be Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Conservative. In other words, the Conservatives get the last two spots. Now if the committee in the past didn't get through the full round of questioning, we would have been the ones to lose. We would end up with just three out of nine, which is a third, which doesn't represent our seats in the House. We have more than a third in the House. So I actually think that proposal is good if you count through it. It also allows the Bloc to get their second question in before the NDP gets its question in.

The Chair: Just to go over that so everyone is clear, and to make sure I'm clear, actually, the first round is Liberal, Bloc, NDP,

Conservative. The second round is Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Conservative. The third round would be NDP, Liberal, Bloc, Conservative. That's your proposal, right?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Yes.

The Chair: Ms. Wasylycia-Leis' proposal is the four Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative consecutively.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Let me say I just threw that out as the order in an ideal world. Obviously to expect that is unrealistic. I think Carolyn's suggestion makes some sense. I think the point of it is that it would be totally contrary to the traditions of this committee and any other committee to completely block out a party. You're talking about 63 minutes of questioning before I would get a chance. The committee is not going to be sitting at that point. We're not even going to get close to that. That is a deliberate attempt to block me out. I can't accept that, and I hope my colleagues won't accept that either.

The Chair: My apologies to you, Ms. Duncan, but I want to make sure I'm clear.

Dr. Bennett, you're saying the first round would be Liberal, Bloc, NDP, and Conservative; the second round would be Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, and NDP; and the third round would be Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, and NDP. Am I correct?

Good. Those are the three options.

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): I would very much like to support Carolyn's motion. I have real concerns with Mr. Carrie's motion. This is the health committee and it is of profound importance to Canadians. To remove the perspective of the NDP and Bloc when we bring such different perspectives, I don't think we can allow that to happen.

The Chair: Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: In all fairness, Madam Bennett is proposing that at the end of the rounds there'll be three Liberal questions out nine, three Bloc, three NDP, and three Conservative. Is that what I'm to understand?

• (1655)

The Chair: Dr. Bennett, that seems to be exactly right. That's my understanding.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: So you're looking at the Conservatives who are sitting here, the numbers are larger, but they will not realistically get questions during the committee meetings.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: You can split your time or whatever.

Mr. Colin Carrie: The NDP would be getting exactly the same amount of time as the Bloc, the Liberals, and the Conservatives, but you have only one committee member.

The Chair: Ms. Wasylycia-Leis.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: The third round, as our chair has already pointed out, very seldom happens. By putting the NDP at the very bottom of the list, it's very unlikely that I would get that chance, but it would allow for the kind of representation from each of the parties that makes some sense in terms of our proportionality.

The Chair: Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Let's say it doesn't happen and we only get to two questions in the third round. In other words, the NDP would lose out and the Conservatives would lose out. So the Liberals would have more than the Conservatives and the Bloc would have more than the Conservatives.

Is that what you're suggesting is fair?

The Chair: Ms. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Perhaps another option out of the original agreement would be that at the end of the second round, instead of Conservative and Conservative, we would go NDP and Conservative.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just to clarify, Ms. McLeod, you're saying it would be Liberal, Bloc, NDP, and Conservative for the first round; Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, NDP, and Conservative for the second; and Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, and NDP for the third.

Is that correct?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: That's correct, if time permits for the rounds.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there further discussion?

We have three possibilities.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: You can take mine off the table. I'll support Carolyn's.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have two possibilities. The one we're voting on is Mr. Carrie's suggestion. For the seven-minute first round it would be Liberal, Bloc, NDP, and CPC.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, we have the first round done.

Mr. Carrie's suggestion for the five-minute second round is Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, and Conservative.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: That is defeated.

For the second round we have Dr. Bennett's suggestion, which is Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, and NDP.

Is that correct, Dr. Bennett?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: On the second round?

The Chair: Yes, on the second round. We're talking about the five-minute second round. You suggested Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, and NDP. That's what we're voting on.

Oh, boy, we're tied.

Bloc, you did not vote, correct? All right.

What do we do now?

The Clerk: The third option.

The Chair: The third option for the second round is Mrs. McLeod's: Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, NDP, and Conservative.

Oh, my goodness, you guys. I guess it's at the discretion of the chair.

Okay. I'm going to try this one more time, to give you one more chance. Have a think on it. Take a deep breath. The first one is this: Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, NDP, and Conservative, which is Mrs. McLeod's. Who's in favour of that one?

● (1700)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Could you repeat that a little bit more slowly, please?

The Chair: I could. Do you want a piece of cheese, Mr. Carrie? I need one.

Okay, slowly: Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, NDP, and Conservative. That is Mrs. McLeod's suggestion.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Just a minute. I'll interpret this for a second. There are 11 spots we're recommending.

The Chair: If you'll be patient, we'll just wait a minute.

Okay. Thank you. Is there Valium? No? Okay.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You heard that?

Are you ready?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Can I make a point?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Colin Carrie: With that, out of 11, we're ending up with three Liberals and four Conservatives. The Bloc has two and the NDP has two.

That was your suggestion?

The Chair: Mr. Carrie, what is your suggestion?

Mr. Colin Carrie: It's Madam McLeod's suggestion.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Colin Carrie: What you're looking at, then, is that the opposition has 7 out of the 11 spots, which is clearly a majority. The Conservatives have 4 out of 11.

The Chair: Okay, I think—

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis: Do you want to put Ms. McLeod's amendment again?

The Chair: Mr. Carrie, I'm going bring up your point about the count. Mrs. McLeod said: Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, NDP, and Conservative. What Mr. Carrie has said is that the opposition gets 7 out of 11 questions and the Conservatives have 4 out of 11.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: If I could make a friendly amendment to Mrs. McLeod's motion, if we add one more Conservative spot, that would give the Conservatives 5 out of 12. The Liberals would have 3 out of 12. The Bloc would have 2 out of 12. The NDP would have 2 out of 12. The opposition would still have 7 out of 12, which is clearly the majority, and the Conservatives would then have the two last spaces. If we don't get there, we would be the ones who would lose out, but we would still get the first choice on the third round.

An hon. member: Where are you putting the other one?

Mr. Colin Carrie: We're just adding a Conservative at the end.

• (1705)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: So it would be NDP, Conservative, Conservative?

The Chair: What Mr. Carrie is saying, I believe, is this: Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Conservative, Conservative.

Is that correct, Mr. Carrie?

Mr. Colin Carrie: That is correct. So that would give.... We're talking about 12 speaking spots. The Conservatives then would have 5 out of 12, which is still less. The NDP would have two, the Bloc would have two, and the Liberals would have three.

The Chair: So it's Liberals three, Bloc and NDP two.

Mr. Colin Carrie: And you said most times the Conservatives would probably not get that spot.

The Chair: No, historically we don't get through the second round very well.

So with your permission, I would like to address Mr. Carrie's and Ms. McLeod's suggestion. They were all on the table, and that's where we're at right now, because we're at an impasse with the other ones.

So Mr. Carrie first of all has said Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Conservative, Conservative. That's what we're looking at.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: That's the amendment we're looking at.

The Chair: That's the amendment we're looking at.

Now Mrs. McLeod's suggestion was Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, just the same, except at the end she put NDP, Conservative. So the only thing that has been changed here is Mr. Carrie added one more Conservative space.

All in favour of Mr. Carrie's suggestion, raise your hands.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Let's go on to the next one.

Now the one we have to address right now that we haven't addressed.... Is the committee in agreement that we keep the same line of questioning when the minister appears? Are we in agreement?

All in favour?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: The same as before, you mean?

The Chair: No, the same as we just agreed on, Mrs. Davidson.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: It was carried that the same speaking order would be in place, Dr. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: But with different timing.

The Chair: No, it was the same.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No, the timing is different. The timing is always different. The order will be the same but the timing is quite different.

The Chair: We did not discuss that actually, did we?

Thank you for bringing that up.

Yes, Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I believe, though, we just voted on keeping it the same when the minister comes. Is that correct, and it passed?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No, excuse me, as a point of order, we agreed to the order that we would speak being the same. The timing with the minister has always been different, with the official opposition having 15 minutes with the minister for estimates or those kinds of things and then moving to 10 minutes for the other members of the opposition.

It is the purpose of the committee to hold the government to account. There's nothing more important than when a minister comes to committee. It is impossible to do estimates in seven minutes.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Dr. Bennett. I consulted with the clerk, and I don't know whether we missed this or.... We did vote on the whole thing and it has been done and carried.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Well, I would like it.... Clearly, the question was not put that way. The question was put, "Is the order the same and is that okay?" We have the motion before us, which is exactly that during the periods of a minister.... This motion before us is what we think we voted on.

So it's up to you, Madam Chair. If you want to drive through what we didn't agree to, then we'll have to find a different way of doing that. We agreed to the paragraph one being the same in terms of the order—

• (1710)

The Chair: Quite honestly, it's in the spirit of collaboration. It's just that we're trying to get this business done. We have decided on the order. I'm going to ask for the will of the committee. We did not discuss the timing with the minister, so at the will of the committee, can we have some discussion about that? Because that is a point. There could be a point of order brought up, because that was not presented that way. I did say "the order of speaking".

We'll have Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I thought when the question was put that we would do the exact same thing when the minister came. That was my understanding. So that's what I thought we voted on, and that's what I thought we had passed. If we want to change something, when we obviously voted on the full thing, then can I just have a moment to discuss it with my colleagues? Could I have a one-minute or two-minute break?

The Chair: I did mention the order of speaking, and the time element was not mentioned. It wasn't. I have to admit that. My apologies. I should have done that, and that's what Dr. Bennett brought up.

We will have one minute. You can go get something to eat. Take one minute so you can discuss the possibilities among yourselves, and we'll get back and discuss this.

• _____ (Pause) _____
•

The Chair: May I call the meeting back to order, please?

Now, we're going to take a look at the time, precisely directed toward the time the minister comes to committee.

Go ahead, Mr. Carrie.

• (1715)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Chair, in the spirit of cooperation, we'll be fine with what you've had in the past on this committee if the opposition would agree that they would allow the chair to be strict about the time we start so that we actually get a chance to raise our questions as well.

The Chair: That's a very good question. Last year we were very strict with time, and everybody adhered to that. Is the opposition in agreement?

Can we say all in favour that the times will remain the same as they were last year when the minister appears, with the understanding that you will watch me closely, and I'll rap this little thing here when the time is up? Can we agree to that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Is the understanding that the minister's opening remarks be 10 minutes? For estimates I guess it's different, but are there no opening remarks for the minister on this?

The Chair: Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: If I could, Dr. Bennett, what we had written in the past with this committee, and we didn't have it in our other committee, but during the appearance of the minister the chair directs that the first 15 minutes, I believe, be for the minister. Sorry—

The Chair: For members of the opposition.

Can we talk about the minister's time? Last time the minister did have some opening remarks. It was 10 minutes, was it not, at that time?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: On estimates or the harm reduction one?

The Chair: I can't remember.

Mrs. Davidson, you were on committee.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I don't remember.

The Chair: Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Could I make a proposal of up to 15 minutes?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Not for estimates, though; it's just if she's coming to talk about a bill or a topic. For estimates she's just answering questions.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I know she'll have opening remarks.

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It's not normal for estimates. They just come and answer questions.

The Chair: Dr. Bennett, I was trying to say that during estimates.... Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I know she will have some statements to make because, one, it's her first appearance before the committee. I know she would like to talk to committee members—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: But she said she's taking us out to dinner. She can do it then.

Mr. Colin Carrie: That's what I heard too.

She hasn't had a lot of questions in the House of Commons, so I think she would like to make a statement.

The Chair: How long do you think, Mr. Carrie?

Mr. Colin Carrie: I don't know exactly, but I'd say a time limit of up to 15 minutes is reasonable.

The Chair: With the indulgence of the committee, seeing as we have a new Minister of Health, and I know she has expressed to me as well that she would like to say hi to the committee, could we agree that—

• (1720)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We're free for dinner Tuesday night.

The Chair: Could we agree, out of respect for the minister, up to 15 minutes? She might not even use it when she appears before us on Tuesday.

I am going to have to call this unruly committee to order.

All in favour of this suggestion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right, up to 15 minutes. Thank you.

Now we have one more thing and I'll let you go.

Will I let them go? No, I guess I won't let them go.

I want to mention Bill C-6, an act respecting the safety of consumer products, which will eventually be sent to the committee. Members might want to start thinking about potential witnesses to be invited to appear. Of course, there's other anticipated legislation.

Perhaps, Dr. Carrie, you would like to speak to that one?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Not at this time, but hopefully we will have a busy session.

The Chair: All right, so this is our next meeting. Our next meeting is February 10 in room 253D, Centre Block. It will be televised. There'll be a two-hour meeting pursuant to the motion agreed to by the committee to set aside two days of meetings to study estimates. The Minister of Health has confirmed she will appear for one hour. The officials will stay after that time.

I think that's all we have to deal with for next Tuesday.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. The meeting is adjourned, and we'll see you next Tuesday.

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