



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

OGGO • NUMBER 032 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, October 6, 2009

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• (1535)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard): Good afternoon, everybody. I see a quorum. It's nice to see this.

There's a perfect seat here that is looking desperately for a chair, so our first item of business will be to proceed with the election of a chair for this committee.

Just to let you know, pursuant to the standing order,

[Translation]

the member wishing to hold this position must be a member of the official opposition, in other words, of the Liberal party.

I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Martin.

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Clerk, if I could, it would give me great pleasure to nominate Madam Yasmin Ratansi for the chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Martin that Mrs. Ratansi be chair of this committee.

Are there any other nominations?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I duly declare Yasmin Ratansi chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

An hon. member: All elections should be so easy, right?

The Clerk: Congratulations.

With the committee's consent, I will now proceed with the election for the first vice-chair of this committee.

[Translation]

In accordance with the Standing Orders, it must be a government member. So it must be a member of the Conservative party.

Ms. Bourgeois.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): I nominate Mr. Rob Anders.

The Clerk: Ms. Bourgeois moves that Mr. Anders be first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

[English]

Are there any other nominations?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Mr. Anders is duly elected first vice-chair of the standing committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Finally, pursuant to the standing order, the position for second vice-chair must belong to a member of the opposition, but from a party other than the official opposition.

Are there any nominations?

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): I'd like to nominate Pat Martin.

The Clerk: Are there any other nominations?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Mr. Martin is the second vice-chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: I will now invite the duly elected chair to take the seat.

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Thank you.

I know that on the agenda it was written "election of the chair and vice-chairs", but I would like to indulge the committee to see what we can do for the next few weeks. I know the committee had agreed to four or five areas of study. The first that is on future business is the examination on October 8 of the procurement process for the integrated relocation program and West Block renovations.

Yes, Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I didn't get any of these suggestions that were circulated. I'd like to make a suggestion, and it's something that we haven't had in the past. I'm wondering if we'd have an opportunity for a steering committee to meet, rather than this committee at large setting the agenda moving forward. It would have a representative from every party. What we found in other committees is that this is a good go-forward policy. I bring that up only for the point that we just don't continue in a debate this afternoon about where we could or may not want to go. I'm not sure we're prepared at this point to proceed with setting agenda items quite yet. I didn't realize that was part of the agenda. I think the steering committee way is maybe a more efficient way of moving forward.

The Chair: I agree with you, Mr. Warkentin, and that's why I was reading the notes. I was under the impression that this agenda that was presented to me had already been approved by the committee, and there were four items that were approved. So if I could just let you know what the business is for the next four meetings, then the steering committee can meet on Thursdays during the noon hour.

Oui, madame.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Since there are new members on this committee and the only thing on the agenda is the election of the chair, I would greatly appreciate it if we could look at the agenda another time or simply ask the steering committee to do so, and for today's meeting to adjourn immediately.

• (1540)

[English]

The Chair: Madame Bourgeois, I have no problems with that. I was just suggesting that the committee has already approved these four items of study in previous meetings, and you already have witnesses lined up. These are not items that I'm suggesting; I'm not giving you anything new. These four items are exactly what the committee itself has chosen and prioritized, and the clerk has witnesses ready. So I'm just letting you know that you had discussed bringing forth an examination of the procurement process on October 8.

This is just to inform you. I'm not telling you these are what you're going to study; I'm informing you of what you had agreed to study on October 8, 20, and 23.

Let's at least keep the October 8 meeting going. Then the steering committee can meet and revisit it if they want to. Is that fair enough?

At least for October 8 you have a study, the examination of the procurement process. This is the Royal LePage stuff you needed to study and had agreed to study. So on October 8, which is the next meeting, that's your first study, so the witnesses can be called.

D'accord, Madame?

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I have no objections, Madam Chair, but you will need to inform us of future plans. Furthermore, I would have liked to have received notice. Whenever chairs are elected, we never know if we need to go back to square one.

For my part, I came here today to elect a chair. We were supposed to discuss other issues at a later date. My colleague tells me that he had received requests to discuss items that are not on your list. We talked about this earlier, and I think we need to review the file on the employees. Mr. Warkentin, you told me earlier that some employees had questions. Since the matter was not identified as a priority, I am certain that it is not on the chair's list. I would have liked to have talked about this.

[English]

The Chair: I agree with you, Madame, and I would suggest that for Thursday, at least, you have one meeting ready so that the clerks will have witnesses lined up; otherwise we won't be able to do any business on Thursday October 8.

Mr. Martin, and then Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just wanted to say that I agree with Madame Bourgeois that it's been my experience that when a committee is reconstituted, we begin all over again—at least that's what I'm used to. I'm not really comfortable with taking up the agenda from the previous committee just as it stands, partly because for that first item of business, I think we were bamboozled by a very, very good lobbyist by the name of Don Boudria. It's the only reason we're studying this issue, and we're doing Don Boudria's bidding here, not the will of the committee.

I'd like to revisit this whole idea of whether or not the Royal LePage thing should be front and centre, because we had a real hard sell by a very slick lobbyist and I think our former chair was vulnerable to that from past relationships.

So I think we should start all over again. We may end up voting to undertake some of those four items, but we may not.

• (1545)

The Chair: Fair enough.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I was going to suggest something different, but there seems to be a growing consensus that maybe we should just have the steering committee meet and determine what our next meeting will be about.

I was going to make a suggestion, if we were going to go along with the Royal LePage study, as to what witnesses we might suggest. But I think it would be better if we just started from scratch with a steering committee meeting, if that would be conducive to you and if there'd be a general consensus for that.

The Chair: I am at the will of the committee.

Ms. Hall Findlay.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you.

I would like to speak for the two Liberal members here. We certainly don't have a problem with redoing the schedule. If there are witnesses lined up for Thursday, I think we can express our group apologies for changing, if that's what happens.

I would like to support Mr. Warkentin's comments earlier, because we had the same discussion, that it would be good to establish a steering committee to not only establish the first group of sessions, but on an ongoing basis. Madam Chair, I think you mentioned weekly, on Thursdays. I think that's a very good thing to do. Perhaps not every Thursday, but be prepared to do so on an as needed basis as a steering committee.

I wanted to close the loop, in that I think as a committee we are exhibiting rather positive cooperation and collegiality.

The Chair: Thank you.

I thought you wanted to get your work done on Thursday, so I was willing to go with the old agenda, but since it's not the consensus of the committee, we will wipe the slate clean and the steering committee will meet at noon on Thursday and prepare a plan of action for the next weeks. That will mean that on Thursday, October 8, we won't have anything to study, and that's my concern.

Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Pardon me, Madam Chair. The steering committee is meeting Thursday at noon. It will have to report back to the members of this committee and see whether they agree with its decisions.

[*English*]

The Chair: The purpose of the steering committee is to reach consensus. There is representation from each party. They will be there and will decide the timetable. Once that timetable is set, it is presented to the committee here, and then we will move forward with the study. Once the timetable is set, that will not be up for discussion.

I am letting you know, then, that the Thursday meeting will be a short meeting. We will be presenting to the committee at large what our agenda items are for the next few weeks.

Are there other things members want to ask, discuss, or present?

The meeting is adjourned.

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