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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Monday, October 5, 2009

—
Chair

The Honourable Shawn Murphy

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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•(1535)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Joann Garbig): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

We can now proceed to the election of a chair.

I'm ready to receive motions to that effect.

[Translation]

Mr. Saxton.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): I move that Shawn Murphy be nominated as chair of the committee.

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

Are there any further motions?

[Translation]

No?

[English]

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

(Motion agreed to)

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

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: I'm now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

According to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the government party.

Is there a motion?

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): I move Mr. Kramp.

The Clerk: Mr. Christopherson moves that Mr. Kramp be elected as the first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there no further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

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

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

[Translation]

Pursuant to the Standing Order 106(2), the second Vice-Chair shall be a member of an opposition party other than the Official Opposition.

[English]

Is there a motion?

Mr. Weston.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Madam Clerk, I move David Christopherson.

The Clerk: It is moved by Mr. Weston that Mr. Christopherson be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

[Translation]

Are there any further motions?

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

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

I would now invite Mr. Murphy to take the chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair (Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.)): Thank you, Madam Clerk, for those proceedings.

Thank you, Mr. Saxton, for the nomination.

The next order of business at this meeting, which does require the consent of the meeting, is to proceed now to the outstanding reports.

The order we will go in is: passport services, Passport Canada, from the 2009 status report; followed by the Governor in Council appointments process, also from the 2009 status report; and then, finally, if we have time, contracting for professional services, Public Works and Government Services Canada, from the December 2008 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

There's a whole bunch. I'll take Mr. Shipley first, then Mr. Kramp, then Mr. Weston.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Just on a procedural thing, Mr. Chairman, we have some new faces that are with us.

The Chair: I was going to introduce them once we get started.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Okay.

The Chair: That was the next item I was going to do, Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Okay.

Do you want to have the discussion on the reports first?

The Chair: No, I was going to introduce the new members first, and then we'll go into this.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Good.

The Chair: As Mr. Shipley has indicated, I have the pleasure because all the.... Mr. Paillé was at the previous meeting, but all the parties have finally nominated their members to the public accounts committee, and as you have already noticed, we do have two members at the table.

First of all, we welcome Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé, from the Bloc Québécois.

Welcome to the committee, and I do hope you enjoy your time here.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Also, too, we want to welcome Mr. Derek Lee. I consider Derek Lee to certainly be an expert on parliamentary procedure, and we'll benefit greatly from his presence here.

Welcome, Mr. Lee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Kramp.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

With consideration of the new members being here, too, I generally like to come prepared to all meetings. Quite frankly, I didn't know we'd be into other business today. If we are, so be it, but I thought we'd just have our election and then be off and gone.

If that is the agenda of reports, then by all means let us make some preparation, come to the next meeting fully prepared, and try to advance them through as quickly as possible. That's where I am at on this. I'm really not prepared to move on those reports.

To be quite frank, I didn't know they were on today, and I haven't really gone through them line by line to ensure that all the consideration be given to that.

So at this particular point I'd like to welcome everybody here, but, quite frankly, I think we should schedule that at the first opportune time. If we have a steering committee tomorrow, then by all means set that on the agenda and let's get at it.

The Chair: Mr. Weston, do you have a comment?

Mr. John Weston: No. I just want to make sure we extend a courtesy to our new members.

Thank you.

The Chair: To deal with Mr. Kramp's suggestion, those reports were circulated. However, I want to come quickly to the bottom line. To proceed to dealing with the reports will require the unanimous consent of the committee, as indicated. I'm going to put the question, to deal with them formally and correctly. Is there unanimous consent among the committee members to deal with the three reports, which I identified previously, at this point in time?

● (1540)

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): No.

The Chair: Okay, not receiving unanimous consent, we have no jurisdiction to proceed with any other item of business. Is that correct, Madam Clerk? Yes, there's no consent to proceed with anything else.

We'll have Mr. Lee and then Mr. Kramp.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): This is kind of a point of order.

The Chair: It didn't take you long to get started, Mr. Lee.

Mr. Derek Lee: I want to apologize in advance. I have always taken a view of these September whip reports, the PHA membership reports, which differ, apparently, from those of the Clerk of the House....

The Standing Orders of the House of Commons state very clearly that the committees continue live—I haven't got the wording—from session to session. That particular standing order was inserted for the purpose of.... It's a default mechanism to avoid any inference that a committee isn't in place or in session.

Since then, they've made a couple of modifications to try to buttress the view of the Clerk of the House. But it's still my view that this committee actually never ceased to exist, and the business that existed at its last meeting is the same business that continues in other meetings. And the chair who was the chair is still the chair. I would rely on that standing order for that purpose.

I haven't had anybody make the argument that this committee didn't exist one hour ago or three hours ago. In fact, the Standing Orders state very clearly that the committee does exist from session to session. So when the chair raises an item of business here at the meeting, it really is simply something that follows from the previous meeting. And if in the previous meeting there was business that rolled over to this one, then it would. But that's not the case. So the committee has absolutely no agenda.

If the committee didn't have any business, and there was none in the notice for today, then the points taken today are probably pretty well founded. But I had thought that there was business in the pipeline. If there wasn't, then there still isn't any. But if there isn't any, and we're going to adjourn, I think we'd better actually take steps to put some business in the pipeline.

The Chair: Well, we have.

If I may respond....

Mr. Derek Lee: Otherwise, there won't be any the next time we come to the meeting.

The Chair: If I may respond, Mr. Lee, there is an arcane procedure in the House of Commons that certainly I find confusing. At some point in time, we're *functus officio*. I was disappointed that we didn't have a meeting last Wednesday. We did have witnesses called and the clerk had spent a lot of time preparing for that meeting. We had to adjourn it, because apparently the committee lost its jurisdiction until the chair was elected, which just happened.

I'll point out that we do have a steering committee tomorrow. Also, we have a hearing scheduled for Wednesday. We're dealing with two of the special examinations of crown corporations: VIA Rail and the Great Lakes Pilotage Authority. Witnesses have been lined up. That meeting will be taking place at 3:30 on Wednesday afternoon.

The steering committee will be discussing the future agenda tomorrow. We do have a number of options available for the week following break week, but there certainly will be an agenda, Mr. Lee, for those weeks following the break week.

As the clerk pointed out to me—and I'll ask her to comment if she has anything to add—the advice I got was that the only item that could really be formally on the agenda this afternoon was the election of the chair and vice-chairs. Then, if the committee so wished, and with the unanimous consent of the committee, we could go into dealing with the reports to take up the last hour.

Am I correct, Madam Clerk?

• (1545)

The Clerk: Yes.

The Chair: Do you have anything to add?

The Clerk: I'll just say that pursuant to the Standing Orders the meeting was convened by the Clerk of the House solely for the

purpose of the election of the chair, and that any further business the committee might wish to undertake would have to be done by unanimous consent today.

The Chair: Okay. We did not receive unanimous consent, so it's the chair's position that if somebody else wants to have another item on the agenda, with unanimous consent we can deal with it; otherwise, we'll adjourn. But there will be a steering committee meeting tomorrow at 12 o'clock. That notice has been sent out.

Mr. Kramp.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I have just a point of consideration, Chair. There's certainly no move to not deal with these reports. Perhaps when we're all here with the committee of the whole we can certainly pass an agreement that this be on the agenda so that when we do go into pre-committee tomorrow we'll all recognize, if everybody here is so inclined, that this definitely will be the guidance we'd be giving to the committee of the whole to take to the committee, and that is to deal with these as our first priority.

The Chair: Is there anything else?

If there is nothing further to come before the meeting, I just want to remind everyone that the Auditor General has graciously agreed to host a dinner tonight with some of her senior staff and members of this committee. I believe she is also inviting the new Secretary of the Treasury Board as well as the outgoing Comptroller General, Mr. Rod Monette. I may have forgotten someone.

I just want to remind people that it's at the parliamentary restaurant and it starts at seven o'clock.

Seeing as there's no further business, the meeting is therefore adjourned.

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