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Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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Tuesday, February 3, 2009

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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

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Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Tuesday, February 3, 2009

• (1540)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Maxime Ricard): Honourable committee members, welcome to the first meeting of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities of the Second Session of the 40th Parliament.

My name is Maxime Ricard. I've been the clerk of this committee for the past year. With me is Isabelle Duford, a new procedural clerk.

[English]

I see a quorum.

[Translation]

Our first item of business is the election of the Chair.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party. I am now ready to receive motions for the election of the chair.

Mr. Volpe.

[Translation]

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): I'd like to nominate Mr. Merv Tweed for the position of committee Chair.

[English]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Volpe that Merv Tweed be elected as chair of the committee.

[Translation]

Are there any further motions?

[English]

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Merv Tweed duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Before inviting Mr. Tweed to take the chair, if the committee wishes, we'll now proceed to the elections of the vice-chairs. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

[Translation]

I am now ready to receive motions for the election of the first vice-chair.

Mr. Watson.

[English]

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): I would like to nominate Joe Volpe for vice-chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Watson that Joe Volpe be elected as first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

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

(Motion agreed to)

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

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): No applause for Mr. Volpe? What's that all about?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the Official Opposition.

I am now ready to receive motions for the election of the second vice-chair.

Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I nominate Mr. Mario Laframboise.

The Clerk: Mr. Volpe moves that Mario Laframboise be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

Are there any further motions?

[Translation]

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

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: I now invite Mr. Tweed to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Thank you, everyone, and welcome.

First of all, I thank you for the confidence displayed in me, as your chair, and I hope that when this session is over, you'll say the same thing.

This is meeting number one of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities on Tuesday, February 3. These are the orders of the day: following the election of the chair, we are going to look at the agenda of routine motions, which have been circulated.

What you have in front of you in the green document is basically the way the committee operated during the last session. It's been functioning that way since November 15, 2007. It is more for discussion about whether there's agreement or not. Certainly, from a chairman's point of view, I found that it worked very well for this committee. I think it was very inclusive. It allowed everybody on the committee to have input at the committee meeting. No one was disallowed from representing one's point of view, one's party's point of view, or one's constituents' points of view. I've circulated that.

Now, we can look at it in one of two ways. We can look at the entire document as a routine motion, or if there is discussion on specific items, I'm certainly prepared to entertain that, too. With that, I'll open the floor and ask for any feedback.

We'll have Monsieur Laframboise.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): I move that we adopt all of the routine motions as presented, in that they reflect what was agreed to during the last Parliament.

[English]

The Chair: There has been that motion.

I'll go to Mr. Volpe.

[Translation]

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I'd like to make two observations.

Firstly, when the committee meets in camera, I would like someone from the whip's office in each party to be permitted to attend, if they so wish.

[English]

So if they want one, I don't mind, if it's okay with everybody else.

The second is that on our steering committee, I thought the practice we had last time was that the subcommittee would be composed of the chair and the two vice-chairs and that the membership was open to the parliamentary secretary and the other opposition party, but not necessarily as voting members.

The Chair: We'll have Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: It has been the practice to allow one government member to vote on that committee. It, of course, would be the parliamentary secretary, if you allowed that. It was our practice to allow me to have a vote. Also, my understanding is that the member of the opposition party, the NDP in this particular case, would also have a vote on the steering committee. That has been our practice.

• (1545)

The Chair: Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Yes, I realize that the practice transcended two sessions. I was there for only one of them, and that's why I wanted to clarify what we were going to do. The clarification, I thought, was that the government member in that instance was going to be represented by the chair. There would be the chair and the two vice-chairs, and the parliamentary secretary and the other opposition member would be there for their input. But if there were an impasse, we wouldn't go to those two members; it would be the three table officers who would make the decision.

The Chair: If I may, whether it happened by accident or by design, I felt, as the chair, that I was basically there, at the request of the committee, to implement the decisions of the committee. I felt a little bit awkward arguing the government position at a committee meeting and then voting for it. I felt that my position was to listen to the debate, and if there was a tie, to make a decision at that point.

I think the parliamentary secretary has voted at all the subcommittee meetings, knowing well that the subcommittee meeting doesn't move forward until we get a vote at the committee as a whole. But, again, I look for direction.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: My intention is to clarify the positions.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Yes, I would expect that in sitting on the subcommittee I would be accorded voting rights on that as well.

The Chair: Again, the subcommittee makes recommendations to the committee as a whole, and we've always tried to make sure that it is as amenable to all committee members as possible. I have no qualms about that. I suspect that the government side would not either.

Monsieur Laframboise, are you comfortable with that?

Okay, we don't have to make a change, then, I think. It would stay that way.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: And your observation on the whips?

The Chair: Yes. I'm just going to put that out there for the committee again. The discussion has been on the point that when we go in camera, a member of the whip's office would be in attendance from each party. Again, I think it doesn't hurt to have that flow of information directly with the whips' offices about what's going on.

If there's no objection, are we happy with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Does that mean the whip's office is responsible for that communication? Or is it simply that a member of the whip's office has to be there? We do have a smaller whip's office than many of the other parties here.

The Chair: We'll certainly advise the whips' offices of the decision made here and also give them the notices of the subcommittee meetings. Is that reasonable?

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It would be at your discretion and your party's discretion whether to send a member or not. It's just to provide them with an opportunity that's fair to all parties and to make sure they receive the communication they would like to have.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: For the in camera meetings?

Mr. Brian Jean: Absolutely. It shows cooperation and that we can work together on this particular file.

The Chair: The motion is on the floor from Monsieur Laframboise that we would accept the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities' routine motions, effected November 15, 2007, to be the ones adopted for meeting number one, Tuesday, February 3, 2009.

All those in agreement?

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: Sorry, but with Mr. Volpe's amendment?

The Chair: I'm sorry. Yes, with the recognition that the whips' offices will be advised and invited to attend in camera meetings and that the subcommittee will reflect all parties.

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

The Chair: Thank you.

As it is the inaugural meeting of the committee, we have no business in front of us. I know that many of you have received correspondence over the summer. I know that the minister has arranged a briefing and an invitation for all members to attend on Thursday. I would like to suggest that next Tuesday we hold our subcommittee meeting and set forth the agenda commencing next Thursday, if that's agreeable.

Mr. Volpe.

•(1550)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: What's this Thursday?

The Chair: There is a briefing on the bill.

Mr. Brian Jean: If I may clarify, I think each party has been approached individually to find out when you would like briefings on the bills coming before the House. There are a few. Obviously, our committee has some pretty aggressive bills coming before us immediately. I think there are three or four. If you want briefings on any of them or if you need any other information, contact my office, the minister, or Mr. Tweed. I'd be happy to arrange briefings on any information that you'd like to receive.

The Chair: Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I just wanted to bring forward a notice of motion on a motion coming forward on the Building Canada fund.

The Chair: Traditionally, we've had the 48-hour rule of notice of motion and I would ask that unless there is an imperative—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I was following the 48 hours.

The Chair: Absolutely. Thank you.

So on Tuesday of next week the subcommittee will meet at this time. We will lay out the agenda and commence on Thursday of that week.

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I just want to mention, Mr. Bevington, that if it is a notice of motion, I would like to receive the substantive parts of that motion so that we know exactly what it is. Actually, the requirement is to receive the contents of the motion as well.

I would like to advise you, too, that if it's something we can do as a department or I can as a parliamentary secretary, or that the government can provide you with outside of that, we'd be happy to start researching it and provide it to you as soon as possible, if it is of such a nature that you would like some information. But I would like the substantive part of the motion so that we know what it is.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thank you.

The Chair: Just for the record, that motion will come directly to the clerk and be distributed through this office.

Monsieur Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I see that Mr. Jean is reaching out to us. I'd like to move a motion. NAV CANADA had undertaken to visit communities to discuss once again its coast-to-coast service. This involves the most remote communities. We have a great many concerns about the situation of some communities in Quebec. If NAV CANADA no longer offers air ambulance service in certain airports, some air ambulances will no longer be able to provide service in remote areas. Therefore, I'd like to move a motion calling on the parliamentary secretary to look into this matter. I think we need to invite some NAV CANADA officials to a meeting to, at the very least, explain the substance of the cross-country talks they are holding. No decision has been made, but before they make any bad ones, we should get an overall picture of the situation.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think we could probably finalize that at the subcommittee and actually slot it in as part of our agenda to meet with him.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Perfect.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have a very similar situation, so I'm very aware of that, as I think Mr. Jean is, too.

Mr. Brian Jean: I'll start the research on that immediately and talk to the department on that.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Could we get our researchers to provide us with a briefing before we actually do meet?

The Chair: Welcome.

Mr. John Christopher (Committee Researcher): Thank you.

The Chair: I don't know if everyone is familiar with him, but John Christopher has been with our transport committee since I have been here—and I think probably a few days before that. He certainly provides us with great information.

Allison Padova is also joining us at the table. She is back from leave and is now a proud mother. We're all very pleased to see her back.

I will ask John this. Obviously, he heard some of the discussion. Perhaps we could ask you to circulate just an overview of Nav Canada's current review of those services. Perhaps we could have that made available through the clerk and then have it distributed to the members.

Mr. John Christopher: Sure.

The Chair: Are there no other comments?

All right, seeing there are none, thank you for attending. I encourage you all to put your hats on and to help us work out the agenda for the next few months.

We will meet again as a subcommittee on Tuesday, February 10, at 3:30 in this building.

Mr. Volpe.

• (1555)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I know it's not my place, Mr. Chairman, but I wanted to join you in welcoming all the new members and the other members who are returning—I didn't want to refer to this chronologically.

The Chair: Ah, *oui*.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I hope we find the same spirit of aggressive debate that was in no short supply last time.

The Chair: I'm sure we will.

Thank you all.

The meeting is adjourned.

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