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Wednesday, September 29, 2010

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Chair

Mr. Lee Richardson

Standing Committee on International Trade

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• (1535)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Paul Cardegna): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

I am taking motions for the position of chair.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): I would like to nominate our esteemed colleague, Mr. Lee Richardson, for chair.

The Clerk: Mr. Cannis has nominated Mr. Richardson.

Are there any other nominations?

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): I would like to second the nomination of my colleague from Calgary Centre, the esteemed Lee Richardson, because he invited me to the stampede this summer and he is an all-round good guy.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): He just lost my vote.

The Clerk: I have a nomination for Mr. Richardson to be chair of the committee.

Are there any other nominations?

I declare Mr. Richardson duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: If the committee consents, we will proceed to the election of the vice-chairs. I trust there is consent.

I'm now ready to take nominations for first vice-chair. I remind committee members it has to be a member of the official opposition.

Mr. Peter Julian: I would like to nominate Mr. Cannis, the member from Scarborough Centre, who is one of the ranking members on this committee and a man of great honesty and ability.

The Clerk: I have a nomination for John Cannis made by Mr. Julian.

Are there any other nominations for the position of first vice-chair?

There being no other nominations, I declare Mr. Cannis elected first vice-chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

The Clerk: I would remind you that the position of second vice-chair must be held by a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition party.

I am now ready to proceed with nominations.

[English]

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): I would like to nominate Monsieur Laforest.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Mr. Laforest has been nominated by Mr. Richardson.

[English]

Are there any other nominations?

[Translation]

I declare Mr. Laforest duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: We'll now invite Mr. Richardson to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): That concludes the business of the day. With the consent of the committee, we might just have a very brief discussion about future business and probably get out of here before 4 o'clock, if that's agreeable to everybody.

Do I have the consent of the committee for a general discussion? Good.

First I'd like to welcome Martha, but she's not here. Please give her our best regards.

We had kind of a late start this session, and I think there were some outstanding things we were going to talk about. I think it was the previous direction of the committee that we might try to work in some travel to some potential future trade targets, including the European Union. Others, including India and China, had also been mentioned, and I can't recall what else had been suggested.

In any event, there have been a number of requests and expressions of interest by member states of the European Union, and these are now pressing that agenda. This is also something I think we previously talked about. It's such a broad area that it was suggested that if we did travel we would perhaps in this case split the committee, perhaps travelling to Brussels together for a few days and then dividing up into two or three groups to travel around. It's difficult to go with more than two groups because we have to bring along extra staff, which can make it cumbersome.

In any event, that is what I thought, and I kind of want to get that going. If we're going to do that, it seems the target weeks would be at the end of October. If we're going to do Europe by the end of October, we had better get the wheels in motion.

The other one I had pegged in my mind was India, probably in February. I just wanted to kick it off.

In terms of ongoing business, I think there is at least the EU. That's where I would be going, unless somebody else had some thoughts on where to proceed beginning on Monday.

So we'll have just a quick round if anybody has any comments on that idea. As I say, if we're going to do a fall trip, we have to get it going.

Mr. Silva and then Mr. Julian.

• (1540)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): I just wanted to know, Mr. Chair, given the fact that the first item that is probably going to be at hand in our committee is going to be free trade between Canada and Jordan, and also with Panama, shouldn't that also be where the committee should be concentrating the trips, as opposed to the European Union...?

The Chair: Yes. Normally I would say that is the case, except that the committee has previously been to Jordan and to Panama, although it has been a while and not all members of this committee as it's now constituted have been—gosh, I don't know if more than two have. That's a good notion. We're obviously going to be dealing with those matters as a committee in the near future, so yes.

Why don't we just think about those things? I'd like the initial thoughts for now. Maybe we'll spend Monday ferreting this out. Talk to your whips and your policy people about what is of interest to you so we can make some decisions on Monday about where we're going to go and how we're going to do it. If Jordan and Panama are vital, we'll have to put that in the pot.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I think it would be very difficult to schedule something for the end of October. If we were looking at Europe, I would assume that it would take a couple of months to put that together effectively, so we're probably looking at the end of November.

Right now Parliament has directed us to look into the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement. That will take a number of weeks, so perhaps it would be the place that we'll have to start. We also have the motion potentially into hearings with AbitibiBowater. I think if we have a few weeks then, going into a potential trip to Europe

would make sense, particularly at this juncture, but I would assume it's going to take seven or eight weeks to set that up, and that takes us through the fall. Then there's the potential for Panama, which is a more problematic agreement, of course, and then the potential for a trip to India before a spring election.

That's a pretty full agenda, so I think we're going to have to pare back. Most likely it would be the trip to India, I would think.

The Chair: Yes. That's fair enough. I think that all makes sense, but I do want to get everything on the table.

Mr. Keddy.

• (1545)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congratulations on your re-election.

The end of October would be problematic for me, but it may be the best time for the committee. If that's the case, I have no difficulty with it.

I do agree, though, that Jordan is probably the first priority. It would make sense at probably the end of November or the first of December, if we could find time to get there. I also wonder, particularly on Brussels and the agreement with the EU, if we couldn't combine that, and if, instead of a direct flight to Jordan, we could combine that with a flight to Brussels, and then Brussels to Jordan or something like that. Maybe that way we could get in an extra day or two on something else.

Again, October is not good for me, but if it's good for the rest of the committee, that's fine.

The Chair: Yes. Well, again, I just wanted.... I'm not nailing things down, but it does sound like a bit of a stretch to try to get anything done by the end of October.

Mr. Silva again.

Mr. Mario Silva: Yes, just very briefly. Actually, my point was already made by Mr. Keddy, I think. In fact, I don't think there is a direct flight to Jordan, so we would have to go to Europe anyway. So you might as well use a day or two while you are there in Europe to do the business of the committee and then go off to Jordan. To me that would make sense.

The Chair: Yes, Frankfurt—

Mr. Mario Silva: It would also save us in the budget in terms of doing a trip to Europe and back and a trip to Jordan and back.

The Chair: Yes, that's not bad.

Mr. Mario Silva: You actually would be saving taxpayers a lot of money by doing that.

The Chair: That's a good idea.

Mr. Holder, Monsieur Laforest, and then Mr. Trost.

Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Just to help us with our spring deliberations, I noted that Mr. Julian mentioned the election in the spring. I was just thinking that for the purposes of trying to clarify when we're going to travel, if he doesn't mind telling us when the spring election is going to be so we can nail that down, I'd be very grateful.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Peter Julian: I didn't get the memo your caucus sent out, so you'll have to tell us.

Mr. Ed Holder: I was just feeding on his comment, sir, because it could be helpful to them.

The Chair: You know, it's just great to have you back, Mr. Holder, and being so helpful, just as Mr. Keddy has always been so helpful with Mr. Julian.

Maybe I could just remind the committee, if you're not aware, that the Jordan free trade bill has been referred to this committee, so that's definitely going to be early on in the agenda.

Well, I think we're getting some progress here.

Monsieur Laforest.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Chair, I think that is in line with what we said in June when the committee ended its work. We had discussed a possible trip to Brussels, as you mentioned. The important thing with respect to the European Union—and I think this needs to be the priority in terms of travel, if it is necessary—is that the trip be well organized and that everyone—or as many people as possible—is able to go.

I think we should take some time during Monday's meeting to discuss it further. As everyone knows, there is a debate taking place in the House right now on the Canada-Panama Free Trade Act. I need to leave soon, and I think we should discuss this further on Monday. But we have no real objections to planning a trip to Brussels in the fall, in order to see what is happening with the European Union negotiations, be it in early or mid November, something like that. There is no problem.

[*English*]

The Chair: Good. I'm sensing a bit of a consensus forming here.

I have to get back to the House as well. They're debating Panama as we speak. We're all missing the minister's speech, and I know that you want to hurry back there to try to catch that.

Mr. Trost.

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): I don't think I'm going to add too much.

The idea of combining Jordan with Europe works great. The one comment I will make is that it might be good to do it the week after the remembrance break week. It's sometimes easier to do connections and stuff coming off a break week than it is necessarily running back and forth to the constituency. Those of us who travel a long way know that it always takes a long time.

So that's just my suggestion, that we aim for the week of Monday, November 15, to do our meeting so that we can pack it together more tightly.

But Europe and Jordan at the same time seems to make sense.

● (1550)

The Chair: Well, that's pretty good. I think we are getting....

The clerk has taken some notes here, and I think what we'll do....

Mr. Keddy, perhaps I could ask you to consult with the department and just get a rough sense from them on how planning might work, even for Monday. I think we might start off by pursuing EU and Jordan in the third week of November. It seems to be a kind of general consensus on where we're going. Let's have it as a place to start from, anyway, on Monday. Any other ideas you have or think about over the intervening time, bring those thoughts on Monday.

I think we should wrap it up. This has been very helpful. We can now get to the House, if that's what we want to do, for the debate on Panama.

Thank you again. Thank you for your confidence in the chair. I'm happy to work with all of you again.

We're adjourned.

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