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Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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EVIDENCE

Tuesday, October 5, 2010

—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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• (0855)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Marie-France Renaud): Distinguished members of the committee, I see a quorum.

[English]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair. I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions and cannot entertain points of order or participate in debate.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair shall be a member of the official opposition.

[English]

I am now ready to receive motions.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I realize that she's not here, but in her absence, I will nominate Dr. Fry.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Ms. Neville that Dr. Fry be elected 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)

[Translation]

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Ms. Hedy Fry duly elected chair of the committee.

[English]

Before inviting Dr. Fry to come to the chair, if the committee wishes we can proceed to the election of vice-chairs.

[Translation]

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

[English]

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

Go ahead, Madame Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): I would like to nominate Mrs. Cathy McLeod.

The Clerk: Moved by Mrs. Boucher that Mrs. McLeod be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

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

[Translation]

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

[English]

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

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): I would like to nominate Ms. Irene Mathysen.

• (0900)

The Clerk: Moved by Ms. Demers that Irene Mathysen be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Ms. Irene Mathysen duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

I now invite Dr. Fry to take the chair.

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

I just want to apologize again. The pick-up cab did not turn up, and I had to call and wait for another one. I'm sorry about that.

To begin with the agenda, you all have the orders of the day.

I'd like to call this meeting to order. We will deal first and foremost with the motions. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(1), we've done the election of the chair, etc. Good. That's finished.

We have a couple of things outstanding. We have a travel budget, as Cathy will well remember, that we're trying to get for the second half of our study on violence against aboriginal women. Cathy very kindly took this budget.... We didn't get it and we were told to bring it back after the summer. So here it is, back to you. I have no idea how the clerk, the analysts, and that team managed to slice this further, but they did. We now have a budget that has been pared down even more.

You will see that we have the first one, which is the west, of course, and we now have some changes. It's going to be Vancouver, Williams Lake, B.C., Yellowknife, and the Northwest Territories. We have cut out the Yukon. We feel that we can get people to come to Yellowknife from the Yukon, etc. We're also going to Edmonton, Alberta. That is the chunk of that little piece of travel.

We're going to be asking a lot of people to come to meet with us, to come to the place where we are, so we're looking for an easy place for them to get to. We're going to be taking this when the committee meets and hope that we get—

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Oh, you're still working on the second part. All right.

They're still working on finessing the cuts for other places in which we can meet. We were going to meet in Meadow Lake, and Alberta, etc. We're told now that it might be better to meet in other places that, again, are cheaper and easier for everybody to have access to us, etc. We're really working on that.

So if you would leave it with the clerk, they will be able to finesse that even more. When we come back, I think there's a meeting of the committee following the break, so we will need to deal with that.

Do you want to adopt this as it is? All right.

Can I have a motion to adopt this part of the budget you have?

Do you have the piece that tells you what that will cost?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Excuse me, Madam Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: Have you seen the cost of this? You've all seen the costs?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes, it is \$117,407.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right. There are no questions?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I don't think so, Madam Chair. In my opinion, it is very reasonable, given everything that we want to do. This is the last part of our task. This committee has never traveled before. We have been very reasonable. It is clear that this study is more and more urgent. We have been able to see that once more in

the last few days. I think this should be easy to defend before the committee; at least, I hope it is.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci.*

You all have the motion. Those in favour of adopting this part of the budget as written? Those opposed?

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

The Chair: That part passes. Thank you.

Now we have to deal with a couple of things on the agenda that were left over from last time. We have the report on non-traditional work that we must finish. Many of you have been sent that report. I'm just saying that this is one of the things we have to finish.

We also have Bill C-471 on pay equity. We will have to deal with that as a bill. We can amend that bill. We can call witnesses. You can make a decision on how we do that and how many witnesses we call. Given that we've just finished a report on pay equity not too long ago, the bottom line is that we need to look at this bill for amendments if necessary or if wished for. That's the second part.

The third one is a study on violence against women, which we are now in the midst of doing. So we now have three pieces held over from last year that we're finishing up.

As for the ministers we had asked to come to meet with us on various issues, we have still had no answers as of today. They were the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Health, and the Minister for Status of Women. Given that the House has just begun sitting, I think maybe everyone is getting their act together. Hopefully by the next meeting or after the break we should get some answers back so we can decide how we do that.

Now we have three notices of motions that we have to deal with.

● (0905)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, if I may...

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I think that it is even more important that the Minister of Justice, Mr. Nicholson, come to meet with us to talk about the \$10 million that has been set aside to deal with violence against Aboriginal women. If we do this study... He says that plans are underway to decide what to do with the money that has been set aside. So it would be interesting to hear what he can tell us about that. I think that the meeting will be very enlightening for us all. Perhaps it could also bring us a little reassurance. He has probably spent all these months thinking about what is going to be done with the money. Surely, he should be able to give us a good idea about his plans for the \$10 million set aside in order to combat violence against Aboriginal women.

Perhaps it will tie in with the requests that we have already made.
[English]

The Chair: Yes, it is in keeping with a request that's already been made, so we have to wait to hear from that. That is something we can't answer until we hear from the ministers.

Now, I would like to deal with a notice of motion. We have one from Madame Demers that was sent to the committee on June 15, 2010. We have a new one, sent October 1, from Ms. Neville. And we have one from Ms. Mathysen that was sent October 1. They've all given their 48 hours' notice.

I thought we could start by dealing with the very first one that was sent to you, and that is the motion from Madame Demers.

The motion reads:

[Translation]

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of the feasibility of an agreement between the two levels of government enabling all women workers in Quebec the option of precautionary cessation of work with compensation from the Commission de la santé et sécurité au travail and that the committee report its observations and recommendations to the House.

[English]

Before I open it up for debate, I would like to ask Madame Demers if she wishes to explain it a bit to everyone.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: With pleasure, Madam Chair.

As you know, about 250,000 workers in Quebec, men and women, work in areas under federal jurisdiction. The pregnant women in that number are not eligible for precautionary cessation of work, which is available in Quebec through the CSST and allows them to receive 90% of their salary for the entire time they are away from work. Currently, if they have to leave work because of a danger to their health or the health of their child, women working in areas under federal jurisdiction may claim employment insurance, which provides only 55% of their salary, and only for 15 weeks. Those women therefore fall into a crack in the Labour Code that can be easily addressed, because people working in areas under federal jurisdiction already pay premiums to the CSST for accidents that may occur at work.

They therefore already pay an amount of money that makes them eligible to receive 90% of their salary if they are injured at work. But that is not the case if they are pregnant. This is only a matter of the two levels of government coming to an arrangement. The minister of Labour recently told us that the government of Quebec needs to rectify the situation. It is ready to do so. The National Assembly unanimously passed a resolution to regularize the situation that the women are in. So Quebec is ready to make the arrangements with the Government of Canada to make sure that all women have the right to precautionary cessation of work on the same basis.

It is just a matter of an understanding between governments. It is not very complicated to bring about and the government will pay nothing for it. The workers will actually pay a minimal difference of about 3¢, I believe, to become eligible for CSST benefits in the case of precautionary cessation of work.

● (0910)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Demers.

Ms. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

As a more general comment, I notice that some of these motions are actually compelling the committee in terms of studies. I'm wondering if at the very start we can really lay out our calendar and lay out our priorities again in a full basket, throwing in the motions. One thing I've wanted to do for a long time—and I haven't put it into a motion so that it gets into our work basket—is the new technology media. You look at that incident in Pitt Meadows and it's just a stunningly sickening issue that I think we need to be looking at.

What I would really like to see between now and the Christmas break is having a calendar, putting these all into one pot, and sticking to the calendar instead of having motions that keep sort of sending us on a sidetrack. I wonder if we could take everything and create a calendar until Christmas.

The Chair: That is what I was going to do, but we need to deal with the motions on the table. Passing the motion doesn't mean that you say when you're going to do the study; it just means that you agree it would happen and then we put it in the lineup.

I do have the lineup here and I thought we could deal with that afterwards.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: But as a matter of process, I guess, do we need to be putting anything we want to study in the form of a motion? Other times, we have really sat down as a group and created our priorities, rather than motions and moving forward....

So I guess I'd just ask the committee: if we want to study something, do we have to do it in the form of a motion?

The Chair: It is up to the committee members to decide if they wish to bring it forward in the form of a motion or not. I deal with the motions when they come, but I think we need a process to deal with the motions we have in front of us. Many of the things we have dealt with in the past have been in the form of a motion, if you'll recall.

I know that, as you say, at the very beginning we have this lineup of things and we have bumped them as we've moved on, but one of the things I have noted about motions that have come to the committee and that we have accepted as a study is the timeliness of the things. You never know what's going to happen in three weeks' time, when suddenly everyone here feels we need to deal with something.

But your point is taken, Cathy, and we're going to sit down and look at that after we've dealt with these three motions on the table.

I'd just like to reiterate that passing the motion means that you agree to do the study. It does not necessarily mean that you agree when you will do the study. When we do our calendar, you can then place it within the calendar as a committee to decide how you prioritize it with the list of other things we have.

I hope you all have this list, because it is the number of studies that we have to do, with the timelines for each of them. This is just going to be added to that. It could go to the top, it could go to the bottom, or it could go to the middle. It'll be up to the committee to decide.

At the moment, what we need to do is vote on the motion on the table, for or against. Is there any further discussion on the actual motion?

Ms. Brown.

• (0915)

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Madam Chair, with respect, I have some concerns about starting a study that is affecting only one province. First and foremost, comparing anything with EI to anything that is related to workers' compensation is like trying to compare apples and oranges, since workers' compensation is solely owned within the jurisdiction of the province.

So it may be that federal workers in Quebec need to have that discussion with their workers' compensation board or directly with their legislature, but because this study would influence only a small percentage of the workers in Canada and does not influence any other province, I'm hesitant to support this.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, me too.

The Chair: Madame Demers, you'd like to respond to that...?

Did you have your hand up, Ms. Neville?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Excuse me.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, Madame Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: But, Madam Chair, we currently receive petitions from all across Canada, not only Quebec, from men and women wanting this Quebec problem to be solved. It is important for them too. We will be tabling petitions tomorrow in the House of Commons. We tabled some last week and we will table more this week. We also tabled some before we adjourned. Petitions come in every day, from all across Canada.

A voice: Oh, [Editor's Note: Inaudible]

Ms. Nicole Demers: No, because you did not sign them. You were not interested.

The Canadian Labour Congress supports our position. All public service workers support our position. Air Canada workers support our position. Radio-Canada workers support our position. We have received petitions from customs workers. We have also received petitions from workers in the Department of Justice. Actually, we have received petitions from workers in every department.

So this is not a problem to be taken lightly. People are aware that 250,000 workers could be affected by the rule. We are not talking about one or two people, we are talking about 250,000.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm just thinking this through. Let me just begin by saying that I agree with Ms. McLeod in terms of the need to prioritize the work and to look at it.

I'm not going to amend this motion, Madam Chair, but should it pass today, I think it's incumbent upon us to do a scan of what else is happening in other provinces across the country. It's not often that we do something that's province-specific. I'd like to see a scan incorporated into the study, however it manifests itself, of what in fact is going on in other provinces as it relates to this issue.

So it's on that basis that I would support the motion.

The Chair: All right.

I notice that Madame Demers is nodding her head in consent.

Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown: Madam Chair, I would like some clarification before we start voting. If Ms. Demers is saying there are 250,000 women who are working for the federal government in Quebec, I find that disproportionate compared with the number of workers in Quebec. That would be saying that one-eighth of the people in Quebec are women working for the federal government and the percentage of those who would be influenced by this study would be a very small percentage of the women who are in their child-bearing years. So I would like to see some numbers and some clarification on that before we even vote on Ms. Neville's motion.

• (0920)

The Chair: Ms. Demers, would you like to clarify that, if you can, right now?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, in Quebec, 250,000 people have jobs under federal jurisdiction. We know that most federal employees are women. Actually, 63% are women. We saw the statistics right here. Just because all the employees are not women, it does not mean that the women who have a right to precautionary cessation of work, as it should be applied, should be deprived of it.

Being pregnant is not a disease. The idea of having to apply for employment insurance when one is pregnant, as if one were sick, seems to me to be antiquated and archaic. As women, we should fight for better conditions of leave for all women when their health, or that of their children, is at risk. I fully agree with Ms. Neville when she says that it should not apply in Quebec only, but everywhere. Unfortunately, the other provinces currently have no provisions like those in effect through the Commission de la santé et sécurité du travail whereby 90% of the salary is paid to pregnant women in Quebec who have to leave their employment.

However, I think it would be quite valid to do a study to see what women have to go through in the other provinces. That has a lot of merit and I support Ms. Neville's position on it.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I understand Ms. Demers very well. There are advances in Quebec that are not found in other provinces. But I have to be honest and say that the idea of working on behalf of only one province makes me uncomfortable as a federal member of Parliament. I think that all women have the right to be treated the same. It may not happen in other provinces, but it may not be our job to study the issue. Employment insurance should be looking at what Quebec does compared to the other provinces. It is up to them to define precautionary cessation of work. We certainly have a role to play, but I think that the best place to send a motion like that is to employment insurance.

In any event, I feel uncomfortable voting. Though I am from Quebec and understand what goes on in Quebec very well, I find the idea of studying it here to be a little peculiar, given that we do not know what is going on in the other provinces. I think it would be more employment insurance's role to go and see people in other provinces. The idea would be to understand what happens in Quebec, where things have moved forward a great deal, and to use that as a way to change things.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Neville had actually suggested that. But as you have said, given the way this motion reads, it is only speaking about Quebec.

I wondered, because Madame Demers kept nodding her head when Ms. Neville was speaking, if she would entertain an amendment, or would herself like to amend this, to reflect looking at other provinces, as both Madame Boucher and Ms. Neville have suggested.

Madame Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I would be pleased to accept a friendly amendment on this notice of motion, Madam Chair. I have no problem with looking at what is going on in the other provinces. Women deserve better conditions anyway.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I'm just trying to draft an amendment, Madam Chair.

Do I have the floor?

The Chair: Yes, you do.

Hon. Anita Neville: Perhaps after "*travail*" we could say, "that the Committee review this matter in other provinces and territories and that the Committee".

Can I speak to that?

The Chair: Please do.

Hon. Anita Neville: I'm not suggesting an in-depth study. I'm really suggesting a review to see what in fact is happening in other jurisdictions. After that we can decide if we want to do anything further with the information.

I think it's important not to focus in on just one province, but to see what indeed is happening across the country.

•(0925)

The Chair: Just to get this moving, I wonder if what you were suggesting, Ms. Neville, was that the committee report its observations, including a scan of what's going on in other provinces as it relates to this issue, and make recommendations.

Hon. Anita Neville: Yes, that's much better.

The Chair: Yes?

So Ms. Neville would insert in the last sentence, after "observations", the words "including a scan of what's going on in other provinces as it relates to this issue".

Can we vote on the amendment?

Yes, Mrs. Simson.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): I just wanted to make one last observation.

I still think given the way it's worded, "enabling all women workers in Quebec", the focus would still appear to be Quebec. While I really appreciate the subject matter, I don't think that it should be worded in a way that is specific to one province, because that's how it's going to read.

You know, if it's an issue, then we're going to be faced with various provinces coming, and we're going to be splintering and regionalizing a process. So if it's going to be a study, it should be for all women and then we'll get to see what actually transpires in other provinces, how they're dealing with it, and if this is even on their radar.

That's just a suggestion.

The Chair: All right. Ms. Simson makes an important point. What I would like is for us to deal with the amendment that we currently have on the table. Accept it or not. Then we will look at the motion as written.

If you accept the recommendation, the recommendation would still read “Quebec,” but then you can vote for or against it. I think everyone has made their points. Unless Madame Boucher has something new to add to the discussion, we have to move on. Let's deal with the amendment.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: No. I just want to...

[*English*]

Repeat the motion, please, with the amendment.

The Chair: The amended motion reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of the feasibility of an agreement between the two levels of government enabling all women workers in Quebec the option of precautionary cessation of work with compensation from the Commission de la santé et sécurité au travail, and that the committee report its observations, including a scan of what is going on in other provinces as it relates to this issue, and make recommendations to the House.

Those in favour of the amendment? Those opposed?

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: The amendment does not pass.

Let's now vote on the motion as it is without the amendment. You have the motion in front of you. Those in favour of the motion? Opposed?

(Motion negated [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The motion does not carry.

All right. Now we have another motion.

The other motion is from Ms. Neville and reads:

That the Standing Committee on the Status of Women unanimously endorse the initiative by Equal Voice to elevate the tone of the debate in the House of Commons on October 19, 2010, in order to attract and retain more women in politics and better showcase the good work that is being done; and that this endorsement be reported to the House as soon as possible.

So this is obviously not a study; this is merely an endorsement.

Ms. Neville, if you don't mind my noting a grammatical piece here, how it reads is to elevate the tone of the debate in the House on that one day. I think you may want to take out October 19, 2010, and put it at the end: “endorse the initiative by Equal Voice on October 19, 2010”. Is that all right? It was basically just that grammatical change.

Hon. Anita Neville: Sure.

The Chair: Do we have any discussion on this motion?

Ms. Neville, would you like to speak to it?

Hon. Anita Neville: Yes, very briefly, Madam Chair. I think all of us here have been approached by Equal Voice. Equal Voice has certainly approached the leadership of every party asking for a day that will focus on—for lack of another way of describing it—good behaviour.

We know anecdotally that because of what they see on question period and in the House, many women are not enticed into politics, and I think that for this recommendation to be endorsed by this committee, that would give it added strength with the House

leadership of all parties. Like you, I hope that it's not just October 19, but that it would be in place longer than that.

● (0930)

The Chair: Is there any further discussion in view of what Ms. Neville has said? Is everyone ready for the vote? Would you like me to reread the motion, or are you happy with it?

All right. Those in favour? Opposed?

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

The Chair: The motion passes unanimously.

We have the next motion, which is from Irene Mathyssen and reads as follows:

That the Committee undertake a study on the cancellation of the mandatory long-form census and its impact on women's equality in Canada; as well as the removal of questions on unpaid work—formerly listed under Question 33 in the 2006 mandatory long-form census—from the new voluntary National Household Survey; and that the study take into account the United Nations Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in which Canada committed to.

I think you mean “which Canada committed to,” because you haven't finished the sentence. I'll take off the “in” there and it will read “which Canada committed to.” All right?

Ms. Mathyssen, would you like to speak to your motion?

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

This is in light of the concerns and the discussion we've heard across the country over the summer, and the fact that whenever we have a study here and we ask Stats Canada for information—we want to drill deeper—the response is always “Well, we can't provide that, we've had cutbacks; there is no collection of that data”. It has impeded our work. While this committee does exemplary work, I think that with better information, stronger statistics, we could complement what we've done and be even more forceful in terms of what we are able to recommend to government.

By virtue of the fact that we've heard from a number of agencies, organizations...government saying how desperately they need this information in order to plan, I think a study here is imperative as soon as we can manage it. Because the government is making decisions that are clearly not benefiting women and families in this country, but most certainly women, I would like to proceed with this.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion?

Yes, Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Especially since, before the summer break, Parliament unanimously agreed to recognize the first Tuesday in April as Unpaid Work Day. But we will no longer be able to quantify unpaid work because question 33 on the long-form census has been abolished.

How can we honour and celebrate unpaid work if we have no way to measure it?

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be supporting this motion.

I recognize Ms. McLeod's earlier comments about prioritizing work. I think this is an example of an issue that's come out of nowhere that has an impact on women.

If I could focus in on question 33, Madam Chair, I had a round table in my riding in early August on the cancellation of the mandatory long-form census. I don't want to say it was the overriding concern, but a very prominent focus of discussion was the cancellation of question 33—what it meant to researchers, what it meant for women who are not in the workplace, and the impact on a number of social programs.

I think this is important. Obviously we're going to have to prioritize it within the work schedule. I think it is one of those issues that no one anticipated, but it's in front of us and we have to look at it.

• (0935)

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

I'll call the question on the motion.

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

The Chair: Given that we've dealt with the motions, I would like us to move in camera to discuss how we prioritize our business. We'll just need a couple of minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have a suggestion.

[*English*]

Je try to speak in English...but I will try in French.

The Chair: Do you want to speak in camera?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: No. I would like to make a suggestion. We have a lot of work to do. I sit on three or four committees, so, if you agree, Madam Chair, and if others agree too, I propose that we have a subcommittee on agenda and procedure like other committees do. In that way, decisions can be made when people are away. I propose that it be made up of the chair, the two vice-chairs and a member of the other opposition party.

Sometimes, we have no time to talk about what we want to do in the long term because our time is limited. We are busy with other things. Is that something that would be of interest to you? We could move through our work faster.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Boucher, but I would like to remind the committee that the very first time we set up this committee, when the House came back after prorogation, we agreed...and prior to that we had a tradition of not doing what other committees did.

Now, if this committee wishes to revisit that question, obviously we should discuss that. Madame Boucher has made a suggestion that we move away from this committee's traditional agreed-on policy of having the whole committee actually decide what we're going to do, and move to a steering committee way of doing things.

Does anyone want to discuss this or do you wish the status quo to prevail?

Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, let me get this clear. The subcommittee would not reflect the composition of the full committee, given that it would only have one Conservative member and all the other members would be from the opposition. Would that mean that the decisions made by the steering committee would not be subsequently debated here?

Mrs. Boucher, are you saying that if the steering committee decides our priorities, we can no longer debate them once they get here?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: At the Standing Committee on Official Languages, decisions were made at the subcommittee. At meetings of the committee as such, the other members were told about the discussions and the conclusions we had come to and all members were asked for their opinion.

Ms. Nicole Demers: So you discussed the same thing twice.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Madam Chair, I would like to see the status quo. I think we made a good decision initially. There's wisdom in greater discussion, and I rely very much on being able to hear that back-and-forth exchange, because I feel we make much better decisions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Madam Chair, I think we had a fairly full discussion when we made the decision to deal with it in committee rather than in subcommittee. I've served on committees in which both processes have been in place. Some work, and some don't.

I guess I was just convinced, when Ms. Demers asked the question, that it would mean we would discuss, argue, debate, or whatever the same issues twice. I think once is enough for me.

Thank you.

• (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Neville.

You did not make a motion, Ms. Boucher, but just a suggestion, and I think I'm getting a consensus or a sense from the committee that they want to stay with the status quo.

All right.

Now, we're in camera still, and I just wanted us—

A voice: We're not in camera. We didn't pause.

The Chair: Oh, I thought we had.

Thank you.

Can we go in camera now, please?

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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