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Standing Committee on National Defence

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EVIDENCE

Thursday, September 30, 2010

—
Chair

The Honourable Maxime Bernier

Standing Committee on National Defence

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Jean-François Lafleur): Honourable members of the committee, my name is Jean-François Lafleur. I am the new clerk of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

I see a quorum. We may now proceed to the election of the chair. I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

[English]

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 nor participate in debate.

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

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): I nominate the Honourable Maxime Bernier.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Hawn that Mr. Bernier be the chair. He can be elected in absentia.

Are there any objections to that? I see none.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Bernier duly elected as chair of the national defence committee.

[Translation]

I am now ready to receive motions for the election of the first vice-chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): I nominate Mr. Bryon Wilfert.

The Clerk: Mr. Easter moves that Mr. Wilfert be the first vice-chair of the committee.

Any objections? I see none.

(Motion agreed to)

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

[Translation]

I am now ready to receive motions for the election of the 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.

I am now ready to receive motions.

[Translation]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): I nominate Mr. Claude Bachand.

[English]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): I'm the only one who may be able to speak here today, so you'd better vote for me.

[Translation]

The Clerk: I see no objections.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Bachand duly elected second vice-chair.

In the absence of Mr. Bernier, I invite Mr. Bachand to take the chair.

• (1535)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Order, please.

[English]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Chairman, today we have a new clerk. I would like a formal introduction.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Sure. That's a good idea.

The Clerk: Thank you very much.

My name is Jean-François Lafleur. I've been with procedural services since 2003. I used to be a legislative clerk, and for three years I was a clerk with the agriculture committee. Just before coming to national defence, I was a legislative clerk. I've been a procedural clerk for seven years now.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Are you a clerk yourself?

Maybe you could introduce yourself.

Mrs. Isabelle Dumas (Procedural Clerk): I'm Isabelle Dumas. I'm also a procedural clerk. I'm here today to accompany Jean-François for the election of the chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Wayne, do you want to add something?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Jean-François should be a good clerk because in the agriculture committee we're always at war with each other. I'm sure he can bring peace to the defence committee.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): We've never had war here.

[*Translation*]

So as not to delay the work of the committee, I suggest that we agree on a list of witnesses for next Tuesday's meeting right away. I suggest that we conduct the meeting with two different panels of witnesses on Tuesday. I am thinking about dividing the witnesses into three panels. Please take note of this, as I will ask you to choose.

On the first panel would be Mr. Bill Matthews from Magellan Aerospace Corporation, Mr. Gilles Labbé from Héroux-Devtek and Mr. Maurice Guitton from Composites Atlantic Limited.

The second panel would consist of the following industry representatives: Mr. Daniel Verreault, GE International Inc.; Mr. Bruce Lennie, Rolls Royce; and Mr. Marc Parent, CAE.

We can group all the company representatives together, and create another panel consisting of former public servants. There would also be three of them: Alan Williams, former Assistant Deputy Minister, Materiel, Department of National Defence; Angus Watt, Lieutenant-General; and Paul Manson, former manager of the CF-18 purchase program.

I don't know whether you'd prefer to have two panels of company representatives or one panel of company representatives and another of former public servants. I would like to know what you think about this.

[*English*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Just for clarification, who was the third member of the second industry panel? I missed that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): It was Marc Parent from CAE.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: CAE? Okay. The only thing I would suggest is that if we have General Electric we also have Pratt and Whitney.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): He was here. As a matter of fact, Pratt and Whitney was here. It was Richard Bertrand.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I would suggest, and I'm not hung up either way, an industry panel and—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): And a civil servant...?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: —then a civil servant panel.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): I don't care.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Either way, but is the industry one over in one day? Are you talking about two one-hour panels?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Yes, two one-hour panels. I was suggesting three panels. Two out of three would be here next—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Okay. As we're focused on industry, why don't we do industry with two panels?

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Are you suggesting that we do industry on Tuesday and then do the other some other day?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Yes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Well, we can do that.

I'm just looking at the witness list here. I don't see Leonard Johnson there. I don't know why he doesn't show up.

An hon. member: He's halfway down—

Mr. Jack Harris: Is he there?

An hon. member: You're just talking about the next two meetings, though.

Mr. Jack Harris: Yes, I know. I just—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): It's the next meeting. We will have a one-hour panel, so two panels, two industry panels—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: That's right.

Mr. Jack Harris: He's there. I'm sorry. I missed him. He wasn't on that former government officials list, but that's fine.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Okay. Do you agree with this?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: So for Tuesday you were talking about two industry—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Exactly.

Mr. Jack Harris: That's fine.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Okay? Are there any other—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Now, are we setting Thursday as well, or are we just starting with Tuesday?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): I think we should set Thursday, but I don't have the list in front of me. Would you like to maybe go ahead with the panel of civilians for next Thursday?

• (1540)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: That would be fine.

Are you talking about two hours with Williams, Watt, and Manson together?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Yes.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: *Ensemble?*

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Yes, next Thursday, unless you want otherwise.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Well, I'd probably defer to you guys on that.

Mr. Jack Harris: Alan Williams seems to me to be a guy who has a lot of experience here, and to put him into a panel with two others might not be adequate. I want to hear more from him and at least have a full hour or even a two-hour session with him.

We have to remember that we're not going to do very much today in terms of committee business. There is a fair bit of it that we have to schedule for the fall. So what I would suggest is that on Thursday we do perhaps an hour and a half with Alan Williams and have a half hour for scheduling. We have to talk about the SAR and the budget for SAR and we have to talk about other plans. We'd like to know when we might be dealing with legislation.

You might have some ideas about that by next Thursday.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Okay.

Mr. Jack Harris: I think we do need half an hour sometime next week to talk about committee business, so if we could have Alan Williams for an hour-and-a-half panel by himself, I'd be happy.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I want to address that point, Cheryl, unless you're going to address that one.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I was going to address that point.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Go ahead, Cheryl.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I'd really like to see both the current and the former ADM at the same time. It's just that we'd be able to verify the questions back and forth at the same time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Do you mean Dan Ross and...?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: And Alan Williams.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Dan Ross was here, though.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: So was Alan Williams.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): No, he wasn't here for this F-35 program.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Not for this program?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: No, and I can't pick an argument with that, but I think we would need balance, so if we're going to have.... Whether we do it next week or not—and I think we should, in fact—if we're going to have Alan Williams, then he should be followed immediately by Angus Watt and Paul Manson, with an hour for each meeting.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): An hour each?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: If Williams is going to be an hour and a half, then Watt and Manson need an hour and a half.

Mr. Jack Harris: Well, I don't know if we're.... We're not setting this up in that way, I don't think, Laurie.

Alan Williams has written a book on government procurement. He's a former ADM. He has opinions. You might not like them, but he does have a lot of knowledge and a lot of experience on the whole issue of procurement.

Now, Angus Watt was dealing with a program—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: No. Angus Watt was dealing with the entire air force.

Mr. Jack Harris: Yes, he was dealing...but he was air force procurement and one particular aspect of it.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: He was the chief of the air staff. He had the entire—

Mr. Jack Harris: I understand CAS, but we're not point and counterpoint here. One of the issues we're talking about is government procurement.

We can't throw all of this into the mix and say who got the best quote of the day. This is not about that. Last time we had a whole bunch of people all in one day, industry people. In my books, aside from the last panel of the day, it was always a chorus of people from industry cheerleading for a project. That's all very well. I don't have a problem with that; it's just part of the PR strategy of the government.

I want to hear from somebody who actually knows and has knowledge of the procurement system and can talk about it. To throw him into a one-hour session in the middle of all the rest of the stuff, I'm not happy with that, for one.

I want a full hour and a half with Alan Williams. I think we have to have time to discuss committee business. I think we should do that soon.

We have another suggestion that we have more industry people come in. We have a pretty good idea of what the aerospace industry thinks of this program in its various formats, and I don't mind hearing from its representatives.

I want to get down to the issue of what this government is choosing to do in terms of this particular procurement project and talk about that from a committee perspective. That's our job.

It's nice to hear what industry people think and that there are opportunities. And we understand that. What we're looking at is the government expenditure of \$16 billion—

• (1545)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Wrong.

Mr. Jack Harris: —that's going to be taken out of the public purse. The commitments that are being made now are going to cost \$16 billion plus.

We need to be able to look at that process in some detail and compare it with what others, who know about the procurement process, have to say about it that may be contrary to what the government is doing now.

I'm pretty firm on this. I don't know if I've got any support on this side of the table—I hope I do—but we just can't set it up so that you've got a choice of quotes for the day. I think we should let Mr. Williams tell his story.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): I'll give the floor to Laurie. I thought it was going to be a short meeting here today and it doesn't look like it. We can stay here until 5:30 p.m., I don't really care, but as a matter of fact, we should listen to everybody on the list here.

In what order we're going to listen to them and how we're going to form the panels is another thing. If you want to have a long discussion on this, it can take the whole afternoon. Personally, I don't really care. I'm here, and I'm not even being paid as vice-chair for this afternoon. It's in my function as usual.

Go ahead, Laurie.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Jack may say it's not point and counterpoint, but in fact with Alan Williams it is. Alan Williams has a particular viewpoint and a particular agenda. If we're going to get Alan Williams for an hour and a half...we have not had the man who, for the last five years, has been responsible for military procurement, which is Dan Ross. We had him as part of another panel and his part was pretty small.

In the interest of balance and fairness, if we're going to get Alan Williams for an hour and a half, then we need to bring Dan Ross back, because it is very much point and counterpoint. The philosophy and practice of procurement under Alan Williams was pretty much 180 degrees out from the practice of Dan Ross, and that was under both governments.

So it's not an issue of Liberals and Conservatives; it's a matter of procurement practice and why did it change? People can have their own opinions about which one is better or not, that's fine, but if we're going to get one side for an hour and a half, then we need the man who's been doing it for the last five years, who I would argue is a little more current, for longer than as part of a previous panel.

Mr. Jack Harris: I don't have a problem with that. I'm not afraid of the facts here. I don't think there was balance last time. I think if we're going to hear from Alan Williams, we should hear from him for an hour and a half. If someone wants to hear from Dan Ross for an hour and a half the next day, that's fine with me.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: In the interest of time as well as being able to sort out the issues of what went on before, what's going on now, and are there differences in practices, having them both at the same time is practical and efficient.

I know Alan likes to put on a show, bring in cameras, and everything else, but this is serious business. It is a major expenditure. It is something that our armed forces are going to rely upon for their safety and security for a generation, and I want to get to the bottom of the issues.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Okay. How about Alan Williams and Dan Ross next Thursday for one hour each?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: At the same time?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): On the same panel, I mean.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Someone said no. Okay.

I will proceed now with motions. I'm going to you, Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: It's on the point.

Mr. Jack Harris: Are we allowed to talk about anything today? We don't have a full committee here. We are missing the chair and—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): We have quorum.

Mr. Jack Harris: Well, we may have a quorum, but we don't have an agenda laying out what we were going to talk about today. You told me yesterday we could think about talking about it next Tuesday.

If we're going to try to sort everything out, we should have the full committee here.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Next Tuesday is resolved. We will have two panels.

Mr. Jack Harris: Okay, let's talk about it next Tuesday.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Okay. Mrs. Findlay.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): I'm not a Mrs., by the way. I understand there's a French-English translation, but—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Madame Findlay?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Martha works fine, thank you. Mrs. does not.

It is on exactly the point about the order of the witnesses. I think my colleague has said we want to hear as much as we can.

To Ms. Gallant's comment about the interest of time, for something of this size and this import I don't think time should be the critical thing. I think this committee should actually devote as much time as is necessary to this given the size and import of the task.

I do actually have some concern given that we know we're going to have witnesses who have very different opinions. In a legal environment, when you have a witness and then you have another witness—one for the defence and one for the prosecution—there is always a chance to come back, specifically because the order actually does matter. So I would actually want to make sure there was the opportunity either for these witnesses, who we know are going to have different opinions, to be here at the same time...and not to allow one to then come after the other. I don't care which one. In either case, if you have two witnesses who are going to have very different opinions, having one person go second without an opportunity for the first one to come back afterwards is giving a significant advantage to the testimony of the second person.

So I would recommend that since the order is important, we should accommodate that. So it may actually make sense to have them come at the same time.

● (1550)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Can I suggest that—and no disrespect is aimed at that side—since none of the Liberal members here today are regular members of the committee, and certainly the critic is not here, that maybe as Jack suggested we should discuss this next Tuesday? We'd have the industry panels on Tuesday and then try to set aside some time to discuss future business at that point—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Do we agree with that?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: —with the regular members and—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Does everybody agree with this? We're going to be maintaining the two panels for next Tuesday, but we'll have a discussion about the panel on Thursday next Tuesday.

Mr. Wolfgang Koerner (Committee Researcher): That's assuming they are going to be available. You're going to give us a little wiggle room to move them around if they're not?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Claude Bachand): Maybe we could ask for a substitute if one can't, because we also have here Paul Lindahl from NGRain and Tom Beach from Handling Specialty. They are on the list. And Sylvain Bédard is on the list also, from L3 Communications. So maybe if three of them can't come, we'll replace them with these three. Okay?

Everything is okay?

Thank you very much. The meeting is adjourned.

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