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Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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EVIDENCE

Wednesday, March 10, 2010

—
Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Wednesday, March 10, 2010

• (1535)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard): Good afternoon, everyone.

[English]

Here we are, back again.

[Translation]

I see a quorum.

[English]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

I am now ready to receive motions to that effect. I will just let you know that, pursuant to the Standing Orders, the chair must belong to the official opposition party.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): I'd like to nominate Yasmin Ratansi from the Liberal Party.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Mr. Warkentin nominates Ms. Ratansi as chair of the committee.

[English]

Are there any other nominations?

[Translation]

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

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: The motion is carried and I declare Madam Ratansi duly elected chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: With the committee's consent, I will now move to the election of the first vice-chair.

[Translation]

The candidate shall be a member of the government party. I am ready to receive nominations.

Yes, Ms. Hall Findlay.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): I would like to nominate Mr. Chris Warkentin as vice-chair.

The Clerk: Moved by Ms. Hall Findlay that Mr. Warkentin be elected first vice-chair of the committee. Are there any other nominations? Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

The Clerk: Mr. Warkentin is first vice-chair of the committee.

Congratulations.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Now, for the position of second vice-chair, the candidate must belong to a party from the opposition other than the official opposition.

Madam Bourgeois.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): I would like to nominate Mr. Martin.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Ms. Bourgeois that Mr. Martin be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

Are there any other nominations?

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: The motion is carried. Mr. Martin is second vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Congratulations.

I will now invite the elected chair, Ms. Ratansi, to take her seat.

Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Thank you very much.

I have to read out a routine motion. On Wednesday, March 3, 2010, the House adopted the following order:

That, for all standing committees, routine motions in effect at the time of the prorogation of the previous session be deemed to have been adopted in the current session, provided that committees be empowered to alter or rescind such motions as they deem appropriate.

I understand that you had a change on the quorum.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Yes, if I may, Madam Chair. I know that in other times in this committee, but not most recently—I don't think we caught it in the last go-round—there has been a change to the quorum.

It says here that the chair would “be authorized to hold meetings and receive evidence”, and it goes on to the end, where it says “including one member of the opposition”. I believe this is a standing order that is most often kept in cases where the chair is a government member, so we may want to put in “a member of the opposition and a member of the government”, or we may want to change some wording.

I think Madam Hall Findlay had a suggestion related to that, but we could make a revision there so that it wouldn't just be of parties that are represented by the chair.

The Chair: Madam Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I would just like to check something, Madam Chair. We had the election of the chair on the agenda and I was not sure if routine motions were part of the election of the chair.

Then, as to Mr. Warkentin's explanation, I must confess that I would have liked to hear about it in advance so that I could study the consequences of this change.

So I would greatly appreciate it if we could stick to the agenda, which is the election of the chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Bourgeois, this is the routine motion that we have to adopt.

You were given the briefing book. If you go to the briefing binder and look at “Meeting Without a Quorum”, and if you appreciate what I've read, which is “be empowered to alter or rescind such motions”, there is just a little adjustment that needs to be done where it says “including one member of the opposition”. Because I am an opposition chair, it could be a member of the governing party. That's the only thing we need to change on this binder. That's all. We're not doing anything....

Before a committee can function, we need to do the Standing Orders or the routine procedures, and the routine motions have to stay in effect. It's just a procedural thing that I have to adjust because there are only four opposition chairs.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I trust you, Madam Chair, but I just want us to stick to that today. That is all.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Hall Findlay.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We understand that this should have in fact been written that way in the first place, in agreement with the proposed change. I just want it recognized that in the event a vice-chair is sitting in your place should you be away for any reason, that it be understood, then, that it would not be a quorum that requires another member of the government. I'm fine with the language as proposed as long as that's understood.

The Chair: That's agreeable, because the change only affects committees that have four opposition chairs.

Now, I know it was the election of the chair only, and we have been away for two months. We didn't start on Monday and we need to decide what we want to do on Wednesday, so I am....

Yes, Madam Bourgeois, let me finish.

I'm just trying to figure out if we can take a look at one of the motions that deals with the stimulus package. We finished the study. We have a report that's already written. It's a five-page report and the analyst has told me that the report is ready. All it needs is an updated list of moneys that have gone out from the government. It will be added as an appendix so that it gives a proper picture of the moneys that have gone out.

If we could just pass that motion so that we can see the report next week, review it, and approve it, we would at least have something to cover us over, and then we can discuss what others can be done.

We'll hear from Madam Bourgeois, and then Mr. Brown.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: First of all, Madam Chair, I do not want to be a troublemaker. But personally, I would have liked to look at the implications of what Mr. Warkentin is suggesting. It is not that I do not trust the people here; it is just that... Even the people here with me seem to have a hard time understanding it. I have a hard time understanding this document.

Next, it is nice to adopt all sorts of things, but we were locked out for a month and a half. Can we not wait another weekend? It is not our problem that the House was closed by this government; we were ready to sit. Can we not wait another weekend without getting annoyed with each other? It was not urgent on December 29, and it is still not urgent. That would allow us to adjust, to gather our thoughts, our documents and to come back and bring them before you. I simply want us to limit ourselves to what is on the agenda, specifically the election of the chair.

As to the other document you are talking about, I was not aware of it unfortunately, and I would like to be able to look at it because I find it hard to understand the impact of the Standing Order that Mr. Warkentin wants to amend. There you go.

I might be making enemies today, but that is okay. I am telling you that I am not very clear on what you are trying to get at.

[*English*]

The Chair: No, you're not making enemies. I'm just seeking unanimous consent. I'm a little confused, because we're talking about a motion to bring the stimulus package back, and you're talking about this procedural change that Mr. Warkentin has.

I'll take Mr. Brown, Madam Hall Findlay, and then Mr. Martin.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): I think it's important to start off so that everyone is comfortable. There's no rush to deal with this. If Madam Bourgeois wants to make sure that this is as innocent as it sounds to all of us, I don't think it hurts to wait until the next meeting to adopt this.

Plus, I think that would actually give us time. If I recall, in past discussions about the agenda and the calendar of the committee, it doesn't end up being a five-minute or ten-minute discussion. It ends up being a bit longer because we all have ideas on things we want to study. So maybe if we wait to adopt this routine motion, we can all submit suggestions of things we'd like to study so that we can have a list to discuss at that meeting as well.

The Chair: Ms. Hall Findlay.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Seeing a chance of getting consensus on moving forward, I just want to make the point that the only reason for this motion is the prorogation, and that had we not prorogued we wouldn't actually need this motion, because it's continuing the study that we were in the process of doing.

[Translation]

Work does not bother me. Honestly, after two months, we are ready to work, we need to work. It is our duty as members of the opposition to continue our work. I would really like to do it, but if we need to wait another weekend, another half a week, we can. But,

[English]

I would like to say that we as Liberals would certainly be prepared to actually go ahead, starting today, because after two months I think we've wasted enough time.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Martin.

• (1545)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It isn't a matter of not being willing to work; it's simply that there's only one item on the order paper. It's a matter of due process here. We were convened today to be constituted as a committee. Now that we're constituted, motions can be filed with due notice, etc.

We could have.... I suppose it's at the call of the chair. You could say that the next regularly scheduled meeting will be a planning meeting where we can talk about future business. But already we've had two items kind of sneak on to the agenda, one a very minor issue that Chris has raised, which I'm happy to agree with, but also this motion that we should be dealing with a report from the last session of Parliament, a report that none of us has seen.

There's only one thing I would suggest in order to expedite things further. Now that the committee has been constituted, there's nothing stopping the clerk from circulating a draft of that report so that we might read it over the weekend. Then, after the planning meeting on Monday, perhaps on the following Wednesday we would be in a position to discuss that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

The reason for the motion is that you cannot have that draft report unless you agree to have that draft report given to you. You can't even study it over the weekend if you do not have a motion to take the report.

What we were going to do is say, okay, if you agree to have the report, then the analyst could say, "Here is what we were stopped at before the prorogation", and you could read it, because we have to present that report to the House for a response. But you can only do it if you pass a motion.

If there is no unanimous consent, then I will have to ask for an adjournment of the meeting. But there shouldn't be any confusion about anyone sneaking out a report on you. It is not a report being sneaked out. All this is doing is seeking the committee's approval for the analyst to bring the report we have already studied. We had already finished the study on the stimulus package. That has culminated in a report. It's a five-page report, according to the analyst.

If it's a five-page report, the only way I can bring the report at the next meeting is if you agree to have the report brought back, through a motion. But if you don't....

So are we back on the page or are we confused? Is there confusion?

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: If it is just for the report, then it is fine. Please understand, Madam Chair, that I do not want to create precedents in this committee. If it is just for the report, I have no objection. If we are going to adopt motions from everywhere—I want none of it—it is out of the question. It is fine for the report.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. So then, here is the chair proposing that the analyst be given the direction to bring forth the report of the stimulus package study that we had finished, so that the committee, at its next meeting on Monday, the fifteenth, can have a look at the report, start reviewing the report, and make the necessary amendments. At least we have a meeting that will help us get started. If that's the case, we can do it. If you're all in agreement....

Can I see unanimous consent to that? Should I repeat what I said? Is anybody confused?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I am. With just one point, there's a little confusion. I'm sorry.

In order to be able to talk about the report this coming Monday, when would we be able to get a copy of the report?

The Chair: You would be—

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Just the draft report.

The Chair: Here is what the procedure is. The clerk has in his possession the electronic version of the report. The moment you say yes, it will be released to you in an hour's time—or a few hours' time—and you will have the weekend to review it and come back with a fruitful discussion for Monday.

D'accord?

Mr. Brown.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Does this mean that at our next meeting we're going to be discussing that report? Or are we going to have time to decide what we want to discuss? Because I wouldn't presume.... Monday is the planning meeting.

• (1550)

The Chair: You can do both. The report is a five-page report. I don't think it will take you.... I mean, it's the committee's will.

Mr. Patrick Brown: We spent weeks on stimulus funding. It could easily take up the whole meeting. My preference would be that the next meeting be a planning meeting and that we not assume we necessarily will go into analyzing stimulus again.

The Chair: That's fine. That's okay, as long as we are in agreement that the clerk is given the authority to distribute the report to all members. On Monday, we can plan, and we can discuss when this report comes out and in what sequence.

D'accord? Yes?

An hon. member: *Oui.*

The Chair: Okay.

We have a motion to adjourn, which is adopted.

The meeting is adjourned.

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