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Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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Tuesday, March 9, 2010

—
Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

• (0910)

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Bonnie Charron): Ladies and gentlemen, I see a quorum.

[*English*]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

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

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): I nominate Merv Tweed.

The Clerk: It has been proposed by Mr. Dhaliwal that Mr. Tweed be elected 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. Tweed duly elected chair of the committee.

Before inviting Mr. Tweed to take the chair, we will now proceed to the election of vice-chairs. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition party. I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): I'd like to nominate Joe Volpe as vice-chair.

The Clerk: It's been moved by Mr. Watson that Mr. Volpe be elected first vice-chair of the committee. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

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

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: So we can move to the election of the second vice-chair.

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

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

Mr. Gaudet, you have the floor.

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): I nominate Mr. Mario Laframboise.

The Clerk: Moved by Mr. Gaudet that Mr. Laframboise be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any other motions? Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to.)

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

[*English*]

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

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Thank you, everyone, for your kindness and confidence.

I have a statement to be read, and then we'll proceed with some of our other business.

On Wednesday, March 3, 2010, the House of Commons adopted the following order:

That, for all standing committees, routine motions in effect at the time of 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.

Accordingly, the routine motions that were in effect at the time of prorogation are reinstated. The clerk will reflect the House order in the minutes of this meeting. The committee can, if it chooses, amend any of these motions. Finally, for information purposes, the clerk has distributed a copy of the motions to all committee members.

Does everyone have that?

I don't know what the committee had thought of for plans, but I would like to suggest that the committee could now adjourn and go into our subcommittee to make our plans. I know there are some motions on the floor, and we have had some direct contact, particularly with Toyota. I'm advised that they're available to this committee as of Tuesday of next week. I also know that there are budget items we can talk about. I think we can decide that in the subcommittee.

But I am open to suggestions from the floor if there are other things the committee wants to discuss. If not, I would recommend that we adjourn the committee as a whole and break into the subcommittee for planning of business, starting on Thursday of this week.

Are there any comments?

Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, colleagues, for vesting your confidence in my position as vice-chair. I think we have some interesting times ahead of us.

Mr. Chair, I think probably the best thing for us to do, as you suggested, is to go into steering committee, but I think it would do us a lot of good to just spend a moment or two on some of those motions, so that we can at least say that they are here and that members who are interested in moving them have an opportunity to have at least a moment's intervention.

It's not my intention that we carry this on, but it would be important to be able to establish that very first item that you suggested; that is, that we go on to talk about the motions related to the Toyota recall file. If we can do that very briefly, then I agree that the committee should adjourn and the steering committee convene, and that we set out the agenda for at least the next six weeks.

The Chair: Monsieur Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Chair, we have received two motions on the Toyota file. Before we meet as a subcommittee, I would be ready to discuss these motions. I have no objection to an open debate. Mr. Watson and Mr. Volpe have tabled their motions.

• (0915)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): In anticipation of this meeting and this topic of speaking to Toyota directly, I did have a chance to, as I'm sure some of you had. My understanding is that they are available. The president and the managing director of Canada are available. This corporation is different from the one in the United States and has a different structure. There are different parent companies.

They have suggested that they are prepared to come forward immediately, next Tuesday, March 16. My suggestion is that, if possible, we set aside that day now as a committee of the whole to study this, to study Toyota and what's going on with the recalls. I do understand that except for 2004, when Mr. Volpe was the Minister of State for Transport, we haven't had as many recalls as we're currently anticipating for this year. Of course, as Mr. Volpe knows, 2004 was a record year.

But I'm wondering if we could have a study then, because if we do the joint study that's suggested by Mr. Volpe, we could be putting that off for weeks, if not months, without any real timeline to do this. I think Canadians want to know about it now. I think it would just be better if we were to follow the invitation and suggestion by Toyota Canada and deal with it immediately on Tuesday, so we can get it dealt with. Really, I don't think we have anything pressing before us—certainly not government legislation.

If we could do that, then, and if we find we have to do additional studies, possibly we then could look at doing one with Industry Canada or somebody else.

The Chair: If I may, before I go to Monsieur Laframboise, I will note that there are two motions that are similar, as we know. Mr. Volpe's motion of March 5 talked about a joint meeting of our committee and the industry committee in dealing with the Toyota recall issue. Then there is Mr. Watson's motion of March 8, which basically invites Toyota to come to our committee.

I'll ask Mr. Volpe to be ready to make his comments, but I have Monsieur Laframboise and Mr. Kennedy, in that order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I prefer Mr. Jean's proposal. Obviously, I will be supporting Mr. Watson's motion. We could meet with the people from Toyota on Tuesday, and then on Thursday, at the next meeting, we could spend two hours with the Transport Canada officials if we have any questions for them and if they have any suggestions for us.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): I guess I wonder, in terms of what we're trying to understand about the recall and the jurisdiction, if industry isn't necessarily going to be involved, won't there be duplication?

In other words, if the point here is not expeditiousness and whether the company is available or not—presumably they'll make themselves available when Parliament asks—but rather to get to the bottom of how best to protect people and whether all those protections are securely in place, and what the impact is for the 270,000 people driving Toyotas in Canada, then we may wish to make sure it's thorough. Therefore, it's worth the time to coordinate with the industry committee. I put that forward for the committee's consideration.

The Chair: I think it's important to note for the information of the committee that the industry committee has the same request before it in the sense of dealing with it jointly.

Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chairman, thank you for repeating that for every member on the committee. As Mr. Kennedy has pointed out, though it is efficient to have parliamentary committees deal with issues that are of interest to them and germane to their competence, it's important for us to think about the issues we might want to address. Some of that has to do with the competencies of Transport Canada and therefore the minister, as well as with Industry Canada and therefore its minister.

The common thread in both, of course, is the company itself. It is a representative of the industry, but because we're talking about recall specific to one company, obviously that company must be here.

I think we can move this along really quickly. I stand to be corrected, and the clerk might be able to confirm whether or not the committees are unable to have a joint study but are able to sit jointly, i.e., they can sit as two separate entities at the same table at the same time.

I'm not sure whether that requires a heck of a lot of work, quite frankly, but it does give us an opportunity, as members of the transport committee, to profit from the insights that members on the industry committee might demonstrate, as they will, through their questioning both of Toyota and of the ministers. We'll also avoid the opportunity that would invariably emerge for people to say that something was not in their area of expertise or competence and that therefore questions on it should be directed to somebody else, and then we'd have to try to do that in the weeks following.

This is what I mean by having two committees working at the same time on particular issues. It's not because we need to beat anybody up, but because we need to get at some issues as lucidly as possible. So I'm going to make the case again. I've talked to a few members around the table, though not everybody, unfortunately. I think it doesn't hurt us to accept in principle the opportunity to pursue this joint sitting. If we agree that in principle we can pursue it, then the steering committee can make the decision for us as we go forward after this.

In closing, I want to compliment my colleague, Mr. Jean, for always doing his research in a thorough fashion and for giving me credit I don't deserve for things. We are, all of us, in a position where we like to think we're more important than anything else in God's creation. I once suffered under a similar illusion. I was minister for all of Ontario, so my head was bigger than this room, but I don't think I was ever Minister of State for Transport.

So in a rare moment of humility, can I ask him to withdraw his claim that I was actually something I was not? Even though it was obviously done in the spirit of giving me great compliments, somebody else, and not me, deserves them.

• (0920)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll go to Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I withdraw my great comments and thoughts on Mr. Volpe; I certainly wouldn't want to do that on purpose.

Thank you, Mr. Volpe, for pointing that out, and I appreciate any correction that you may find for me in the future.

I was going to suggest that obviously the best thing to do would be to set our own agenda and to invite the industry committee to participate. They can certainly come around the table and deal with it on the basis of our agenda.

I don't know if any other members have heard from Toyota directly, but I would really encourage you to do so, because the voluntary recall is just that; it's a voluntary recall in Canada. A different piece of equipment, in fact, has been causing some of the problems in the United States, so certainly there is a different scenario there. I don't know why the minister is involved. Is he involved in some way because he drives a Toyota? I'm not sure exactly how he is directly involved with the recall except through the department, but I think it would certainly be best to have Toyota here, and to invite industry, and to get on with it.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chairman, we don't want to be really quick and jump at Toyota or any other assembler. I think here we're talking about a government responsibility. I don't know whether the

minister drives a Toyota or not, or whether his department is replete with automobiles that come from that manufacturer, but since you've raised that, I think no matter what we do with respect to bringing Toyota here on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, or any other day of the week, we should not forget that the Minister of Transport is the very next person on the table as well.

So I'm assuming that when you made the proposal to have Toyota here, you also wanted the Minister of Transport here.

The Chair: Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Herein lies the wisdom of your original suggestion, that the subcommittee begin to address the issue, plan it with respect to context, and explore the issue in some depth. But if the purpose is simply to get a start on next week, I think my motion is sufficient. It will allow us to then tell Toyota and transport officials to prepare to meet.

If we determine as a committee at some point that more needs to be done, let the committee do that. If we want to plan out and get extremely detailed, then let the subcommittee do this. If we're going to make up our minds today, I think my motion is sufficient—enough to start planning and to move on with it.

• (0925)

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I was just going to say that not only did Mr. Volpe miss a great opportunity with Toyota, but you missed a great opportunity with Transport Canada yesterday. I know your assistant was there, but certainly you would have heard, in relation to the jurisdiction of the minister and the department, what they can and can't do with product recalls. That's why I'm suggesting that at this stage the minister is probably not involved. Once you have the opportunity to listen to Transport Canada and Toyota, you might come to a different conclusion. Certainly I would have suggested that you do both before that, along with high-speed rail.

The Chair: Mr. Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Chair, this is one of my reasons for suggesting that we ask the Transport Canada officials to meet with us on Thursday. I am even suggesting that this meeting be televised, just like the meeting with the Toyota people.

Before accusing the minister, we should perhaps give Transport Canada a chance to provide a good public explanation on how things work and what the differences are between the United States and Canada so that the people understand. It is very simple. If it is the minister's fault, we are going to attack him, but if it is not his fault... I do not want us to impugn motives before we have all the information.

This is why I suggest that we meet with Transport Canada on Thursday, with Toyota on Tuesday, and, after that, we will see.

I want our approach to be balanced. It always has been and I would like it to stay that way.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, everyone, for your input.

With that, we'll adjourn this meeting and break into a subcommittee.

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I'd much rather have the decision made about Toyota right now, in the committee of the whole, because then we don't have to come back and adopt the subcommittee agenda. We've already had a full discussion of it. Why can't we at least set the agenda in the full committee for Thursday and Tuesday?

The Chair: Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: In light of that, would it be appropriate that I move my motion formally, then, and we generate discussion around it?

The Chair: We have to deal with Mr. Volpe's motion first, as it came in first.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Fair enough.

The Chair: If we want to deal with that as a committee of the whole, or if we want to deal with it as the subcommittee...

Mr. Brian Jean: We've already talked to it and discussed it as a whole.

The Chair: Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: It's only on a rare occasion that I disagree with Mr. Jean, so I will take full advantage of the rarity and disagree with him.

I think the reason we spent the last 10 minutes going around the table was simply to establish—if I can recall the word—the “principle” of actually debating this in subcommittee with an interest of going forward for next week. It was to give the steering committee a sense of where everybody was at, not to make the decision in full committee, because we needed to do that in a fulsome discussion in steering.

Now, I didn't want to pre-empt that from taking place, but if Mr. Watson is going to be directed into a position where he would want his motion read, debated, and then voted upon right now, before we go into steering, then I guess we're going to have to engage in a fulsome debate on the motion that preceded his, which would of course be mine.

In the spirit of cooperation, I'm going to take Mr. Watson's reflection as an indication that all of us have heard sufficiently on the principle of that motion and can go immediately into steering committee to discuss the mechanics of what to do next week, and indeed what to do Thursday.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: First, I want it on the record that I do not direct Mr. Watson to do anything. I don't think anybody else does either—except possibly his wife.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Strike that from the record, Mr. Chair.

● (0930)

Mr. Brian Jean: I do want to make sure that we.... After we have the subcommittee, we have to go into the committee of the whole to adopt the subcommittee's agenda anyway, so why not just deal with it now? We've already discussed it fully, both ways.

We know that we quite frankly do not want your proposal at this stage, Mr. Volpe. Instead, like Mr. Watson's motion, let's deal with it, have a vote on it, set the agenda for the next two days, and then have the steering committee go in and talk about what's going to happen after that. It seems to make a lot of sense to me.

I would like to have the motions moved at this time and dealt with by the committee of the whole. I think that's the consensus of most of the members.

The Chair: Are there any comments?

Are you prepared to speak to the motion, Mr. Volpe?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Without having to consider Mr. Watson's motions, let's begin by making the appropriate logistical preparations to have officials from Toyota. We haven't discussed which ones, so I think that's something the steering committee could do on Tuesday. Mr. Laframboise has indicated that perhaps we can go a little bit further and start alerting transport officials to appear here as well. I don't have any problem with that.

The only other consideration—and I think the steering committee can deal with it—is whether we would do it jointly or individually. If we are already going to be dealing with the principle of having transport officials and Toyota officials—we haven't determined which ones yet—I don't have any problem with that, and I don't think my colleagues, at least from the Liberal Party, have any problem with that.

Where I didn't hear agreement in principle was on whether the Minister of Transport would also appear at those hearings, not necessarily on Tuesday but perhaps on Thursday.

If I hear there's a sense we should do that as well, then we can proceed. We don't even have to vote on this.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Laframboise already suggested that we have Toyota and that we have Transport Canada—and I've named two officials who have said they're prepared to come here—and then decide at that stage whether or not the minister should be brought in for questions. Let's deal with it on that basis, and let's move forward with it and invite the industry.

We've also heard direct evidence from the clerk that we can't have a joint meeting but that we can invite them to participate with us. Why don't we do that—invite them to participate with us, and if they want to do so, they can do so? But in the meantime, we should get on with Canada's business.

The Chair: May I make the suggestion that perhaps we not remove Mr. Volpe's motion but table it for now and address Mr. Watson's motion? Mr. Watson's motion does state that we would be calling relevant witnesses for testimony, including officials from Transport Canada and Toyota. The subcommittee could determine who those officials would be, and I think that would satisfy both sides. We could also even make a subamendment to Mr. Watson's motion whereby we would invite industry committee members to attend and participate if they chose to.

Are you okay with that, Jeff? That way we've kind of resolved Mr. Volpe's issue as far as getting them involved in the debate goes, and then if we need to go further, we can.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have just a couple of thoughts. I'm certainly open to members participating. In terms of where this study fits, though, I don't want this committee to lose its pre-eminence, because I think appropriately the study should be with the transport committee, but if industry members want to participate or be here, that's fine. I'm certainly open to some language that way.

With respect to where I was going with my motion in terms of attendance, obviously we would want Toyota officials.

If you'll recall, Mr. Chair, I did send a letter to you specifically talking about Transport Canada's road safety division and the defects investigation unit, which would be a good starting point at the very least. As I said earlier in my comments, if the committee decides it needs to do more than that, then fine, the committee can make that determination. But I think for the purposes of planning, if we're going to address the issue, it might be sufficient to get officials prepared to come next week.

So I would be prepared to move my motion. I don't know if somebody would have to add some language to it, through a friendly amendment, to have members of the industry committee participate with us. I'm not sure how you'd phrase that, but I'd be open to that for sure.

The Chair: Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Just in the mode of trying to establish a sense of principle and collegiality so that we can go forward and make the decision, I don't think there's a need for that. As long as I understand that Mr. Watson is not excluding the minister or ministers from the officials in Transport, then I'm okay with moving forward.

• (0935)

Mr. Jeff Watson: Just to understand the substance of my motion, I've stated where I want to start preliminarily. If we determine that more is needed—and I think Mr. Laframboise has spoken in a very similar regard—then fine, the committee can make that decision. But I think we have a good starting point, at least, in involving the industry committee folks and have them attend the meetings.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I don't want to be obdurate, Mr. Watson and Mr. Jean, but I didn't hear you say that you were not going to exclude the ministers. If there's not going to be an obstruction to getting the ministers forward, that's fine.

Mr. Brian Jean: I was going to propose a friendly amendment. Can I propose a friendly amendment?

An hon. member: Go ahead.

Mr. Brian Jean: I'd like to do so. It's to Mr. Watson's motion. In particular, after "Communities engage", in the third line down, I would add "and invite industry members to participate in a study into the recall...". It's just to make sure that we invite industry members to participate in that.

An hon. member: Industry committee members?

Mr. Brian Jean: Yes, industry committee members. Is that satisfactory?

The Chair: I think that just for clarity I'll read this, based on what I have: "pursuant to the request by the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, in a letter to Committee members... the Standing Committee on Transport...engage and invite industry committee members to participate in a study into the recall of vehicles manufactured by the Toyota Motor Corporation, calling relevant witnesses for testimony, including Transport Canada and Toyota officials, and that the results of the study be reported to the House of Commons".

Are you okay with that?

Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chairman, again, I don't want to be punctilious here. There was no committee and there were no committee members on March 3, so I think on the basis of that, there was no letter.

But again, I think we're trying to build consensus. All I ask for is that Mr. Watson and Mr. Jean would be prepared not to obstruct the calling of ministers before the committee so that the steering committee can make its decision. I think you quite rightly said, "Let the steering committee do its work." This discussion on principle is designed to make things go faster on Thursday. If they're prepared to say that, I'm not asking for anything else. Then we can just move on.

The Chair: Monsieur Laframboise.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I understand there is a bit of a debate there, but the motion introduced by Mr. Watson states: "...calling relevant witnesses for testimony including..." This could be the minister if we decide to call him. You know that the committee is always free to call whatever witnesses it wants, and ministers are free to appear or not. They can decide when they will appear, so we must keep that in mind.

The only thing with your amendment, Mr. Jean... Mr. Tweed, you read: "invites the committee". I would prefer it if we wrote: "invites the committee members". Because if you invite the committee, it means that the committee must absolutely be there. If its schedule does not permit... Could you say "invites the committee members"? At that point, those who can come will come, and those who cannot will not come. I would not want wording that prevents us from meeting.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Volpe.

[Translation]

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Laframboise, although we always agree, this time, I can only accept the first version, in which we "invite the committee." If the committee, in its wisdom, decides not to send all the members, it will be its decision—a decision of the other committee—not ours. So I prefer the original version.

But I accept what you are saying, Mr. Laframboise, about "relevant" witnesses for this study, which does not exclude ministers.

I noticed that government members were saying yes or no. The only question that I am raising is simply that they accept this principle: the witnesses will be those the committee considers “relevant” for the study; that means not excluding ministers right from the start.

• (0940)

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Watson: There's nothing exclusive about the language.

The Chair: No. If I left it out, it was by accident. It is written here. It basically says “and invite industry committee members to participate”. That is the way Mr. Jean presented it. If I didn't say “committee members”, it was written there.

I do believe that saying “relevant witnesses” includes anybody we as a committee choose to invite. I would interpret it that way. If you want to be more specific, then I guess we'd have to agree on it.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: So there's no need. I think we've agreed generally in consensus, in spirit, and then we can move on to the steering committee. We don't need to have a vote on anything.

An hon. member: We're going to have a vote.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: We don't need to.

Mr. Brian Jean: I'm asking to deal with it now.

The Chair: A vote has been requested on Mr. Watson's motion, which is amended to read: “That, pursuant to the request by the

Minister of Transport, in a letter to committee members dated March 3, 2010, the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities engage and invite industry committee members to participate in a study into the recall of vehicles manufactured by the Toyota Motor Company, calling relevant witnesses for testimony, including Transport Canada and Toyota officials, and that the results of the study be reported to the House of Commons”.

All those in favour of the motion?

Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: My motion is tabled.

The Chair: Mr. Volpe's motion has been tabled, not defeated.

• (0945)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Thank you.

The Chair: All those in favour of the motion as amended? Opposed?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: With that, I'm going to adjourn this committee, and we'll break into a subcommittee to finish the planning of the agenda for the next month or so.

This meeting is adjourned.

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