



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, June 9, 2011**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Pat Martin**



## Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Thursday, June 9, 2011

•(0850)

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard):** Good morning, everyone. This is the first committee meeting of this 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament. Isn't that wonderful?

I see a quorum.

[*English*]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair pursuant to the Standing Orders. I am now ready to receive any motions you might have in this regard.

Mr. Wallace.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** I nominate Pat Martin from the New Democratic Party for the chairmanship.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Wallace has just nominated Mr. Pat Martin for the position of chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Are there any further nominations?

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** Mr. Pat Martin is duly elected chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Congratulations.

With the consent of the committee, I would now like to preside over the election of the first vice-chair of this committee. The candidate for this position must be a candidate from the

[*Translation*]

government party.

Are there any nominations?

Mr. Blanchette, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP):** I nominate Mr. Mike Wallace.

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Mr. Blanchette that Mr. Mike Wallace be elected first vice-chair.

Are there any other nominations?

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

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare Mr. Mike Wallace duly elected first vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

**Some hon. members:**Hear, hear!

**The Clerk:** We will now proceed to the election of the second vice-chair. I would just like to remind you that, pursuant to the Standing Orders, the candidate shall be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition party.

Are there any motions?

Mr. Wallace, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Alexandre, are you going to do it?

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** It is my pleasure to move that Mr. John McCallum be elected second vice-chair.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Boulerice moves that Mr. McCallum be elected to the position.

[*English*]

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

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** Mr. McCallum is duly elected second vice-chair of this committee.

Now I would like to invite the chair, Mr. Martin, to take his seat.

Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP)):** It looks as though this election is rigged, because they already have a name tag there that says "Chair/Président".

Thank you very much.

Thank you, Marc-Olivier, for conducting our election.

We should note that we're very well served by one of the most experienced and well-respected clerks in the House of Commons, Marc-Olivier. It will be a pleasure having him guide us through the next number of years.

It's a great honour for me to be elected as the chair. Just as a point of curiosity, I was a member of the founding committee when this committee was first struck. I think that was in 1998, when the chairman was Reg Alcock. We played a role in putting together the scope and the mandate of this new committee. This is the newest committee in the House of Commons, with an interesting and broad mandate. I don't think anybody has even tested the boundaries of the mandate of this committee. The scope and the scale of it are virtually whatever the members decide within the parameters of this committee.

There are a bunch of routine issues to get out of the way when we first establish a new committee. As a start, I think it might be worthwhile, because we have lots of time, to just go around the table and introduce ourselves. There are some committee members who are brand new to Parliament, never mind brand new to committees.

So maybe take 30 seconds or something to introduce yourself and what your background was prior to getting elected. Or if you're a veteran MP, perhaps tell us when you were elected and what your committee work has been.

I'll start. I'm Pat Martin, MP for Winnipeg Centre. I was on the government operations committee as the vice-chair in the previous Parliament.

Nycole, would you like to introduce yourself?

• (0855)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP):** Thank you, Pat.

My name is Nycole Turmel. I am the member for Hull—Aylmer. I was previously president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

Thank you.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Good morning, everyone. My name is Alexandre Boulerice. I am the new member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and the party's Treasury Board critic. Until recently, I was a communications advisor for the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Thank you.

**Mr. Denis Blanchette:** My name is Denis Blanchette. I am the member for Louis-Hébert. Over the past 27 years, I have worked in computers for the Quebec government.

[English]

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** My name is John McCallum, member of Parliament for Markham—Unionville.

I've had an interesting evolution in my 11 years in politics, from member of the first party and member of the Chrétien-Martin cabinet to member of the second party, and now to member of the third party. So we'll see how it goes.

**Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC):** I am Bernard Trottier, new member of Parliament for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Prior to getting elected, I was a business consultant for 20 years, all in the private sector.

[Translation]

I am bilingual. I am Franco-Albertan by birth, and now I am Franco-Ontarian.

[English]

**Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC):** My name is Scott Armstrong. I'm a member of Parliament who first was elected in the byelection of 2009.

Previous to that, I had 18 years of experience as a professional educator at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels.

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** *Bonjour.* Good morning. My name is Ron Cannan, member of Parliament for Kelowna—Lake Country in the beautiful Okanagan Valley.

I now have the opportunity to serve for a third term. I was on the government operations committee for the last part of the last session, and on a variety of committees. I spent nine years on city council and have a business background.

It will be a pleasure to work with you.

Thank you.

**Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC):** Good morning. I am Peter Braid, member of Parliament for Kitchener—Waterloo.

I was first elected in 2008. Prior to being elected, I had both business and federal government experience.

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC):** Good morning. I'm Kelly Block. I'm from Saskatoon, and Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar is my riding. It was dubbed as "the one to watch" in 2008 and 2011.

Prior to that, I was mayor of a small community in Saskatchewan and was involved in the health care system.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I'm Mike Wallace. I'm the member of Parliament for Burlington, which is in Ontario just west of Toronto.

This is my seventeenth year of elected office, five years federally and thirteen municipally—I'm in my eighteenth year—for the City of Burlington. I was a municipal councillor before that.

I'm here for my third term, so I've been around a little bit. I was on the finance committee prior to this position I have now.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** I am Jacques Gourde, the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, a constituency in Quebec. I was elected in 2006. I was parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, and so on. Before that, I was a farmer in my region.

[English]

**The Chair:** Excellent. Thank you, everyone.

We could be together for quite some time. This will be a four-year Parliament, so we look forward to working with all of you. There are a number of interesting studies that we might get into.

There are mandatory orders of business. As a new committee is constituted, we have to get approval on a number of routine motions. Then, if it's the will of the committee....

I've spoken to Mike on the government side, and we've agreed that because it's a relatively short meeting, it would be worthwhile to spend a few minutes talking about future business, or at least the business that will obviously be before this committee, which is the estimates, and scheduling some meetings to do that.

This is the government operations and estimates committee, and the people who are new to this committee will know that it's an integral part of our government system that the public accounts committee studies spending after the fact. The government operations and estimates committee has the opportunity to look at proposed spending and to study this and to comment on it.

A lot of us have lamented over many years that we don't really spend a great deal of time on that stage. There is lots of criticism and lots of scrutiny and oversight on the spending the government has done, with positive and negative comment on that, but there is very little comment at the front end, which seems foolish when we are dealing with hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of government spending. I am hoping this committee will perhaps pay more attention to that.

I know that Mike has become somewhat of an expert on the estimates process, and we have our researchers and our clerk to guide us through some of that as well if we wanted to get into a more in-depth study of that stage.

First things first, though. We do have these routine motions, so let's get them out of the way and then we can open it up to talking about what business the committee will actually undertake.

I need a motion, I guess.

You all have the list of routine motions in front of you?

• (0900)

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I'll move the motion on the analysts.

**The Chair:** Mike Wallace moves the first motion:

That the Committee retain the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

I don't think there's any objection. All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** That's done; we have analysts.

**A voice:** And here they are.

**The Chair:** Excellent. By some happy coincidence, we just happen to have a couple of analysts in the room.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Welcome, gentlemen. I'm going to let you introduce yourselves when you get settled in.

Some of us have been on the committee for a number of years and already have had the pleasure of meeting the analysts, but perhaps we could have a minute or two on who you are, your background, and what brings you here today.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Édison Roy-César (Committee Researcher):** Good morning. My name is Édison Roy-César and I am an analyst for the government finance section of the Library of Parliament. Since the last parliamentary session, I have been with the OGGO committee. I have a master's degree in economics. That's my area of expertise.

Now here is my colleague Maxime-Olivier.

**Mr. Maxime-Olivier Thibodeau (Committee Researcher):** Good morning, everyone. My name is Maxime-Olivier Thibodeau. I am a lawyer and analyst at the Library of Parliament, also in the government finance section. It will be my pleasure to work with you on the OGGO committee. I have also been with the committee since the last session. We look forward to providing you with all the background information required for your work, impartially and as thoroughly as possible.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thanks to both of you. Welcome.

I think everyone who has been on committees before knows that especially the nature of government operations and estimates can get quite technical, and we rely heavily on the good work of our analysts to guide us.

The second motion is one that can get a little more controversial or have a little more debate involved; that is, obviously when we have witnesses we have to divide the questioning time amongst the parties in a fair and equitable way so that all parties and in fact all individual members get an opportunity to question the witnesses. I know that there has been some talk amongst the parties already, and I suppose there's a standard that's quite common through most committees, but again, we have the right as a committee to structure it any way we want.

Is there any input on that?

Mike.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Mr. Chair, I do have a recommendation, and I think it's actually fairer than what we've had in the past, to be honest with you. I did an analysis of how many seats we have in the House. The Conservatives have 53% of the seats, the NDP has 33%, and the Liberals have 11%. I have no issue with the five- to ten-minute piece for opening statements, so let's make the assumption to make things as simple as possible.

The first round used to be a round of seven minutes in a lot of committees, so I think it's fair to give everybody five. What I recommend is 30-minute rounds, six rounds, and every round exactly the same. If we get through round one, this repeats itself in rounds two and three. It would be five minutes for the Conservatives, five minutes for the NDP, five minutes for the Conservatives, five minutes for the NDP, five minutes for the Conservatives, and five minutes for the Liberals. That's 30 minutes.

If we get through two rounds, that virtually gets everybody covered. Actually, the NDP gets an extra turn and the Liberals get an extra turn. One of us on our side will likely have to miss. If we get to three rounds, then everybody gets covered off on that. It's very simple: five minutes each in that rotation and then it would continue to repeat itself. It would just be one round continuing to repeat itself.

• (0905)

**The Chair:** All right. That's one idea.

John.

**Hon. John McCallum:** It's traditional—at least it always was in the past—that the first speaker be from one party, the second speaker from the second party, the third from the third party, etc. I would hope that we would preserve that tradition, in which case we'd have either an NDP member or a Conservative first and second, then a Liberal third, and then proceed further. That's the way it's been done on committees that I've been a member of in the past.

**The Chair:** Yes. I think what Mike is putting forward, though.... It is true what you say, but also the speaking terms are longer.

The clerk recommended a breakdown that started with 10-minute rounds because we have only three parties now, instead of four. To divide up the first round, he suggested that we should each have 10-minute rounds. I know what Mike's getting at: that more members would have an opportunity to question. Quite often if we had a 10-minute round, one of the parties might break it up, with five minutes for you and five minutes for Kelly, for example, on the same round. So I see where you're coming from on that.

The one observation I'd make about your proposal, though, Mike, is that I've never seen a committee where the government side questioned the witnesses first.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Well, welcome to the new reality.

**The Chair:** Given that the government knows everything anyway and has the inside advantage to all questions asked, really it's the opposition that needs to ask questions of the witnesses. That's been the reasoning and the logic, I think, in most committees.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Mr. Chair, based on that round that I offered up, the Conservatives get three; the NDP get two; the Liberals get one. That's 50% of the time for us, 33% for the NDP, and 16% for the Liberals, which is actually more than what they have in the House in terms of seat count.

I think it's very fair. I've lived only in a minority Parliament until just recently, so it may have been the tradition that the opposition went first, but I think this is absolutely the fairest system that we have.

**The Chair:** Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations on your esteemed position.

**The Chair:** I like that word.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** For the new members, my name is Peter Julian. I am the NDP industry critic, and I am here as a substitute, so you will see me from time to time. My riding is Burnaby—New Westminster.

I'm interested in Mr. Wallace's proposal.

But you're absolutely right, Mr. Chair, that the tradition is, particularly at the government operations committee, that the opposition parties begin, and that's something that's gone back, whether it's been minority governments or majority governments, over the last few decades. That's just an overall tradition that is an important parliamentary democratic tradition, which of course Canadians want to see maintained.

As far as the time allocation goes, I think Mr. Wallace is on the right track in terms of the proportionality.

The problem is, though, as you raised, Mr. Chair, that traditionally there's been a longer first round. I think that's what the clerk has suggested as well, particularly when we get into interesting hot issues. That first round is going to be an important one. I think that's something that needs to be brought in. The proposal was, I believe, eight minutes potentially for the first round.

**The Chair:** The clerk actually recommended that the first round be ten minutes.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** If you wouldn't mind, could you just repeat what the clerk recommended initially?

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Sure. We'll add this to the works:

That witnesses be given five to ten minutes to make their opening statement; [and then] ...during the questioning of witnesses there be allocated ten minutes for the first questioner of each party including the responses of the witnesses [in the order New Democratic Party first, Conservative Party second, the Liberal Party third]; and that thereafter, six minutes...be allocated to each party...

In the second round it would be the Conservative Party first, the New Democratic Party, the Conservative Party again, the New Democratic Party, the Conservative Party again, the Liberal Party, and then Conservatives and New Democrats if there is time. That's pretty much what we had last time, except the length of questioning differed.

We have Ron Cannan first and then Mike.

• (0910)

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** I just want to clarify that in some of the committees—and it's up to the committee to clarify with the clerk—when we talk about five minutes, that includes the answer from the witness—or does it? I've seen a member take five minutes to ask the question and then a witness take however long. So we need to be clear and concise.

**The Chair:** The chair would have to be a lot tighter then and cut people off at five minutes. If somebody wants to take four minutes and thirty seconds to ask their question and tries to milk their time a little more by then giving the witness four minutes to answer, that's eight and a half minutes. That's not fair to anybody. If we have only five minutes to question a witness and get answers, the chair will have to be really strict about that.

Mike.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Yes, and for those who are new, the five minutes is yours to use. You can use it for a speech if you want to do a five-minute speech. That's up to you. It's your slot.

I just want to point out that I was on both the finance committee and the industry committee, Mr. Chair. Each of those committees had different speaking orders. Particularly on the industry committee, I would say, the Conservatives, who were the government last time, did not get their rounds as other committees did. We were pretty fair on the finance committee, to be honest with you. But on industry, it wasn't quite as fair. Let me just put it that way.

So in a spirit of compromise, which we of course are all in, I still agree with five minutes; I think five minutes is fair. Every individual member then is treated equally, in my view. But instead of having the Conservatives go first, we could let the NDP go first, then the Conservatives, then the NDP, then the Conservatives, then the Liberals, then the Conservatives. The round would change so that instead of us going first we would go last in that 30-minute round. So the NDP would go first, but it would still be five minutes.

**The Chair:** Okay. Well, I think the opposition side appreciates that movement—

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Do I get an announcement in your newsletter on how we have been compromising?

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** What a nice guy. It's like Camelot.

But I can't mail into your riding anymore—

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** And we moved the Liberals up a little bit in that one, so....

**The Chair:** It still doesn't.... I guess if you viewed the original, the Liberals would be getting to their round of questioning at about the same time.

If we had contemplated 10-minute rounds each, you would be getting your turn after 20 minutes of questioning. What Mike just proposed is that you'd be getting your turn after 25 minutes of questioning.

In the interests of fairness, just to get us off to a good start, I was wondering if there would be interest in letting the Liberals have the third five-minute slot.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** It's your slot. If you want to give it up to them, that's up to the NDP.

**The Chair:** Well, yes. It's just that we do want to.... I don't want this to be a real stumbling block. In the interests of fairness, we want all three parties to be represented virtually equally, never mind their obvious disproportion. As far as questioning goes, it's the opposition side that needs to get the answers, especially in the government operations committee. The government side already knows the answers to all the questions that the government members are testifying about.

When you have a technical witness here from the Department of Industry, your members can be briefed by the Department of Industry on all those issues. We have to go fishing.

I'm not trying to give away time. It's not the chair's role, actually, and here I am, probably intervening as if I were a committee member. I'll leave it at that. I just had a thought.

Peter Julian is next in line.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Well, there have actually been two proposals put on the table, Mr. Chair, and I think we are working our way gradually toward a compromise.

Of course, if what you're proposing is that the Liberal Party move up in the first round, that could not follow in subsequent rounds—

**The Chair:** No.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** —because what that would mean, of course, is that Mr. McCallum would actually get more of a speaking order than the official opposition, which I'm sure he would disagree with as well.

It would allow for that traditional first round of all three parties, but it would mean that we're having a second round that is different from the first round.

● (0915)

**The Chair:** Yes, it would.

My interest, just so you know, is this. I have been on that side, obviously, for 14 years and I know that everybody wants to question the witness while the issues are fresh. If you make one party wait until 35 minutes have actually gone by before there is a chance to ask the first question, the member is not really part of the process, in my view.

If there were willingness, if we could make it so that all three parties got one five-minute shot, and then maybe because of the ratio and proportion issue the Liberals may have to skip a round or wait longer for their second turn....

But with five-minute rounds, there would be a second turn, and you would still get your 11% or 15% of the—

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** They'd get even more. They'd get some of our time.

**The Chair:** You can spare a bit, for God's sake—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I'm not saying we can't, Mr. Chair, but I'm going to move this along so we're not here all day.

I am going to move the speaking order. I move number two, I guess it is, on this list: the witnesses will be given five to ten minutes for opening statements at the discretion of the chair—which I agree with—and then the order will be all five-minute rounds, with the New Democrats first, then Conservatives, New Democrats, Conservatives, and Liberals. One round and that round will continue: we don't need a second round. That's everybody.

**The Chair:** So you've moved the Liberals up—

**A voice:** A Conservative at the end—

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Yes, and a Conservative at the end. Sorry. I didn't say the Conservative at the end.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** That's the 30 minutes.

**The Chair:** Just to be clear, you have NDP, Conservative—

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** NDP, Conservative—

**The Chair:** —NDP, Conservative—

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** —Liberal, Conservative.

**The Chair:** All right.

You have heard the motion. I can't editorialize on it.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I know that's tough for you, isn't it?

**The Chair:** Is there any more debate on the subject, knowing full well that with the majority they have the numbers here anyway?

But I appreciate the movement so far. We do want to get this off to a good start. The reason we're spending a fair amount of time on it is that this is going to last us for four years. It's rare to change this mid-session. You do this once and establish the speaking order, so we want to make it fair and we want to get it right.

On the motion, John?

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Chair, obviously they have the voting power, but I do think this is a deviation from past practice, and I do think it is setting us off on a tone that "might makes right" rather than a fair and equitable procedure.

I think I've never been on a committee where the third party did not speak third. If the third party speaks fifth, I think this is a deviation from past practice and tradition, which I don't think is appropriate.

Obviously I don't have the power to stop it, because they have the majority, but I would like to register my opinion on the point.

**The Chair:** Fair enough, John.

The only thing I would add, perhaps, is that if we had established 10-minute rounds, you would have been on as the third opportunity. So after 20 minutes, you will still be on. Your spot will only be five minutes. What Mike puts forward is that there will be three speaking spots for them, two speaking spots for us, and one speaking spot for you. That's reasonable, in my view.

Again, I'm just the chair. Here I am editorializing again.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Chair, then, could you just go through...? Most likely, with five-minute segments, we're probably looking at 15 or 16 potential questions in a two-hour meeting.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** So would you mind, just through you to the clerk, basically laying out that meeting for us so that we know exactly where we stand?

It looks to me like Mr. McCallum, the Liberal Party, would get two interventions. I certainly think that's fair. It looks like every Conservative member will have an intervention. It looks like that's fair.

So I actually don't think this is as bad as it might appear at the outset if you go through the entire 15- or 16-question block.

• (0920)

**The Chair:** Yes, that's right. It looks to me like the Conservatives would end up with six opportunities, the NDP with four—and you only have the four spots—and the Liberals with two in the course of two rounds.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Well, we're actually going to be able to go longer. Two rounds would be 12 questioners. That's one hour.

Probably, looking at two witnesses, it is more likely that we'll go to 14 or 16.

**The Chair:** Yes, I see your point.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Probably two and a third, or two and two-thirds; if we could just have that laid out, I think....

Actually, although no party will be completely happy, I don't think it's necessarily too bad.

**The Chair:** The upside is that every committee member would get a speaking spot, which is something we've often strived for in committees by divvying up spots. You don't want to sit there week after week and never get an opportunity to ask a question.

I think we may have arrived at a pretty good solution here.

Did you ask the clerk to lay that out?

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Yes. I'd like them just to roll through the 14 or 16, *s'il vous plaît*.

[Translation]

It's just to give you an idea of how the meeting will unfold.

[English]

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I'll do it.

My guess, Peter, is that, on average, we'll have 30 minutes of presentations from witnesses. Let's say we have three and they use up all 10 minutes. That leaves us an hour and a half for a discussion.

Each one of these rounds, which is exactly the same, is 30 minutes. You'll get two in the first half-hour, you'll get two in the next, so you'll get six if we make it a two-hour meeting: 30 minutes of presentations and an hour and a half of questions.

We'll get enough to cover everybody here, and John will get three opportunities. He actually gets three spots.

**The Chair:** In fact, if the spots stretch a little bit, it will be your spot that drops off, as the last questioner of the last round.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** We will be the last questioner. It will be Jacques and I not asking questions, or whatever.

**The Chair:** We might have arrived at a pretty good layout there.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I'm not just a pretty face, Mr. Chair. I've been working on this.

**The Chair:** You stayed up late last night.

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** A point of order.

**The Chair:** A point of order?

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Yes: no self-aggrandizement. It isn't really allowed.

There is a motion on the floor.



Just to be abundantly clear, it reads, Mike, as follows: the first questioner, NDP; the second, Conservative; the third, NDP; the fourth, Conservative; the fifth, Liberal; the sixth, Conservative; to be repeated until we run out of time.

That's fairly clean and clear.

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

**The Chair:** Good. We have consensus. We're off to a great start.

The third item we have to clarify is with regard to witnesses belonging to the same organization. It's a challenge for the clerk sometimes to schedule witnesses when we have a study where the various parties submit all their wish lists for witnesses. It's up to the clerk to try to decide a reasonable balance in the limited time we have.

I presume this motion is about giving the chair and the clerk the latitude to cluster witnesses or...?

**The Clerk:** Do you want me to explain it?

**The Chair:** Yes, explain it.

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The third motion on the list of routine motions pertains to this committee in particular. It deals with cases where witnesses from the same organization attend the same hearing. If the group of witnesses appearing in the first hour and the group appearing in the second hour both belong to the same organization, this motion will require the chair to consult with the committee on whether to start all over again with the round of questions during the second hour or whether to resume from where it left off at the end of the first hour. In light of the motion that has just been carried, I am not sure whether that motion is still relevant, but I remember that the chairs were supposed to consult with the committee under circumstances like that. This only applies to instances where witnesses in a two-hour meeting belong to the same organization.

I clearly remember the reason behind this motion. At the time, the president of the Treasury Board, Mr. Stockwell Day, had appeared alone during the first hour, then he left and the Treasury Board officials took over in the second hour. So the members of the committee asked the chair whether they had to start all over again with the rounds of questions or continue from where they stopped when Mr. Day left.

It is up to the committee. The motion could be set aside for this session.

Thank you.

● (0925)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Marc-Olivier.

Mike.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** My experience over the five years has been that it is a new meeting with new people. For example, from my own perspective, particularly on estimates, I don't bother with the minister because that has included more political questions than I've been

interested in, and we've started a completely new round on estimates, during which sometimes I get more than my share of the slots. I don't see that as carrying through. I think the first hour with the minister is part of that meeting, and with officials it's a new meeting.

**The Chair:** Peter.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I think the clerk's recommendation is to leave this up to you, Mr. Chair. You can then talk to the people in the government, the official opposition and the Liberal Party. I feel that is a wise move.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I can assure the committee that I would do that, in consultation and cooperation with committee members, and I don't really see it as being a big deal, frankly.

Is it necessary that we pass this motion, or are these just recommended motions?

**The Clerk:** It is in the form of an instruction to the committee chair to canvass the committee if this situation arises or happens. In my experience, it happens very rarely because mostly you will have a set of witnesses for the first hour from one organization and for the second hour it's going to be an entirely different organization appearing before you. You will start the round of questioning from scratch at the beginning of the second hour.

**The Chair:** It would be bad scheduling to have two groups that were so similar. I don't think we would schedule witnesses like that.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Don't you canvass for the motion?

**The Chair:** We have moved the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Now, regarding the subcommittee, this is always contentious. We need to decide for planning future business whether we want to do that as the committee as a whole or strike a planning subcommittee. Most committees have a smaller planning committee—it's just easier—with the knowledge that anything the planning committee decides needs to be brought to the parent committee to be ratified and approved anyway. There's that comfort to the majority of the committee.

Mike, do you have some suggestions about this?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I actually like the operations of subcommittees, as someone who sat on other committees where the subcommittee did the work and then hopefully came to an agreement. We normally saved the time of the committee to do committee work other than subcommittee work. I am very positive about a subcommittee approach.

I am also under the assumption that the chair would be there to break ties and would not be voting on subcommittee concepts. What is the practice?

**The Chair:** You and I have talked about this before.

I don't even see the subcommittee dealing with majority votes as much as trying to come to a consensus. Seeing as it's meaningless anyway if whatever the subcommittee decides has to be approved of at the main committee, I would hope that the subcommittee would meet and agree on everything that's possible to agree upon and leave anything that we can't agree upon for the main committee to decide.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Based on the information in front of me, it's you, me, and Mr. McCallum. Can we add the parliamentary secretary?

**The Chair:** It's up to the committee.

My personal view is the parliamentary secretary is an agent of cabinet and has no real role. Otherwise it's sort of contrary to the independence of committees. They're welcome here, of course, but in terms of planning future business, you like to keep the non-partisan aspect of committees as prominent as possible, I think.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** The only thing is that in my experience, Mr. Chair, sometimes the parliamentary secretary knows more about what's going on than the members do. It's helpful to know what's happening in the departments they represent, and that helps in determining what we do.

• (0930)

**The Chair:** There certainly isn't any harm in having as many members as you want at it.

The biggest argument against subcommittees is that they are just one more meeting in your week, and that gets to be a nuisance. That's the reason we're trying to keep it down to a minimum. You and I get paid extra money to be the chair and the vice-chair, and these other poor MPs don't.

Peter.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm inclined to agree with you that keeping the committee to you and the two vice-chairs is the best way to function. Of course, if you add the parliamentary secretary, you have to add a member of the official opposition, which means we're moving from a subcommittee of three that is essentially on priorities to a subcommittee of five. That then begs the question that if your subcommittee is that large, why would you move forward with a subcommittee at all? There are two ways to go here. One is to keep it narrow and focused with three individuals, one of which represents each party. The other is to enlarge it to a group of five. I think for a whole range of practical reasons, it's smarter to keep it with the proposal that's here for us.

**The Chair:** Ron was on the list even before Peter here.

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** It's okay.

My experience with subcommittees is that if they aren't representative of the percentage of the main committee, then they are basically a waste of time. So you need to have a microcosm of the macro committee. That would mean the same percentage of representation on the subcommittee.

Otherwise, you would be the tie-breaker, Mr. Chair. The way it's set up, if there were two Conservatives, one NDP, and one Liberal, which are the vice-chairs, it would be the chair. So you would need one more Conservative in order to have a proper representation of the main committee.

**The Chair:** I'm not arguing with you, Ron, but that's sort of taking the idea that you need to win votes at the planning committee stage. Again, it really doesn't matter what happens at the planning committee because the first item of business at a main committee is to ratify and approve the decisions.

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** I'm just saying in my experience it does matter, because we've had those discussions, and we've lost them at the subcommittee, and they've come back to the—

**The Chair:** And you tie up the main committee with the same argument?

I see.

**Mr. Ron Cannan:** Exactly.

You spend a whole committee debating the whole issue of the subcommittee.

**The Chair:** Point taken.

The list says Mike and then John McCallum.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** So why don't I move the motion with the addition of "the chair, the two vice-chairs, and one additional member from the government side"?

**The Chair:** Okay.

You've heard the motion.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** That way it doesn't have to be the PS.

**The Chair:** Right.

There's a motion on the floor.

John, do you want to speak to the motion?

**Hon. John McCallum:** No.

**The Chair:** Okay. You've heard the motion. That would be the subcommittee, the planning committee. And again, this is no big threat to either side. It's only a subcommittee.

The clerk points out that perhaps we should also qualify that the extra person from the Conservative side would be someone designated by the whip. That's obvious. Okay.

Peter, do you want to speak to the motion before we vote?

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Yes. I'll offer a friendly amendment.

I understand what Mr. Wallace is proposing, but again, if what we're doing is moving from a group that is basically setting the agenda, which is what the subcommittee is supposed to do, to a group where there are broader concerns, the only way to balance that off would be to have a member from the official opposition as well.

So you have another member from the government side and another member from the official opposition side, because the chair, as you know, is playing the coordinative role. He's not there in a partisan context. He's representing the committee as a whole.

So it complicates things quite considerably, this motion. I offer a friendly amendment, which would be a subamendment, that we add a member from the official opposition.

**The Chair:** Okay. I guess that's in order as a subamendment.

On the subamendment, Scott Armstrong.

**Mr. Scott Armstrong:** I'm going to speak against the subamendment and on the very fact that if something comes back from the subcommittee to the parent committee, and it's not something that the majority agrees with when it comes back out, we could spend one meeting or maybe multiple meetings discussing it. It could be debated and debated and we wouldn't actually get to the work of the committee, when we know what the end of that discussion is going to be anyway.

We'd rather get down to and work on the business of what we should be working on. That's where I see the subcommittee having the one extra government member saving us a lot of time and allowing us to do the work that Canadians want us to do.

• (0935)

**The Chair:** Well, I think you're right. The worst possible outcome is to waste the committee meeting with witnesses sitting there and us bickering over some future business. That's not something we want to promote at all.

Mike?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** He said what I was going to say.

**The Chair:** Okay. Let's put the subamendment to a vote. All those in favour of Peter's subamendment to add another opposition member to the planning committee?

(Subamendment negatived)

**The Chair:** Now, on the main amendment to the motion, then, the motion stands as just the chair and vice-chairs. The amended motion is Mike's, which is to add one person of the government side's choice to the planning committee. All those in favour of the motion as amended?

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

**The Chair:** That's carried, so our planning committee will be the chair, two vice-chairs, and one other of the government side's choice. No problem.

Okay. Now, on meeting without a quorum, this is important for the new members. Sometimes it is important; it's difficult for every member to get to every committee meeting. If a meeting is scheduled just to hear testimony of witnesses, it's not really necessary to have all members here, because nothing is going to come to a vote.

There is no danger of losing a vote if we're only hearing testimony, so a lot of committees have reduced their quorum for hearing witnesses down to a pretty small threshold. Some people travel across the country to give their testimony, and it would be rude and a waste of time if we didn't have a quorum to hear them. This is a reasonable motion, I believe:

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence

—and only to receive evidence—

and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three (3) members are present, including one member of the opposition.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]...opposition.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** That is how this would read. Again, there are no tricks in this, I don't believe. It's a reasonable thing.

Peter.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's very reasonable. Just for clarification, though, you would not be included as a member of the opposition as chair of the committee?

**The Chair:** No. That's true.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** So we're actually looking at three members present, including one member of the opposition.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** One would presume that one would be from the government as well.

**The Chair:** Yes.

Actually, the clerk is correcting me; I would be included in those numbers.

It's a good thing he's here.

So I don't know if that makes...

**The Clerk:** The chair is part of the quorum.

**The Chair:** In other words, there could only be one on each side and me, and we could hear the witnesses' testimony.

**The Clerk:** If you wish, you can add "excluding the chair of the committee".

**The Chair:** Yes, we can certainly amend this motion. It's just for guidance.

Mike.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Just for clarification, Mr. Chair, it says "at least three members are present", including one from the opposition. Does this assume or does this mean that one has to be from the government side? Or could you have—

**The Chair:** You could have all three from the opposition, I would presume.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Okay. So I'm going to move a change that there be at least one from the government side.

**The Chair:** Okay. So one from the government side—

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Of the three—

**The Chair:** That is at least one from the government side and the opposition.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Yes.

**The Chair:** That sounds reasonable. It shouldn't be that hard to press someone into service.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** We'll be able to find one.

**The Chair:** Yes.

Does that sound okay, everybody? Do I need to put it to a formal vote?

It is so moved. All in favour of the motion as amended by Mike to add one member of the opposition and one member of the government side, or reverse the order?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

**The Chair:** The motion is carried. We can write that up in some sense of language.

Next is distribution of documents. This has been a contentious issue, and I hope we keep a firm hand on this in this committee as well.

That only the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to distribute documents to the members of the Committee and only when the documents are in both official languages, and that [all] witnesses be advised accordingly.

In other words, often witnesses will show up with documents they wish to circulate and they are not in both official languages, and that wastes everybody's time. If we make that a hard and fast rule at this committee at the outset, the clerk will be directed to advise witnesses not to bother showing up here with something in only one official language.

Is there any objection to this? Will anyone move this first of all, please?

**Mrs. Nycole Turmel:** I so move.

**The Chair:** The motion is moved by Nycole Turmel.

Is there any discussion? All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The motion is carried. Thank you.

Next is on working meals. This is critical. This is vitally important:

That the Clerk...be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the Committee and its subcommittees.

We should add "delicious, healthy, sumptuous".

Will anybody move this motion, please?

**Mr. Denis Blanchette:** I so move.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Denis.

Is there any discussion? Are there any directives regarding diet or anything like that? No.

All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next is travel expenses and living expenses of witnesses or travel accommodation. This is important as well.

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two...representatives per organization; and that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the Chair.

Is there any discussion, and could I have a mover for the motion?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I so move.

**The Chair:** It is so moved by Mike Wallace.

All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The motion is carried. Thank you.

That does it for the pro forma motions. Oh, no, we have one more page.

Thank you.

On access to in camera meetings:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to have one staff [person] present from their office **or from their party** at in camera meetings.

The bolded language was added recently. I remember when who may attend in camera meetings became an issue. This contemplates that our whip's assistant, who may be touring the committee rooms and may pop in to count heads or observe, be allowed to attend as well. It just gave more flexibility to the parties as to who might be in the room.

Mike, will you move that motion?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I so move.

**The Chair:** Is there any discussion or debate? All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The motion is carried. Thank you.

On transcripts of in camera meetings:

That one copy of the transcript at each in camera meeting be kept in the Committee Clerk's office for consultation by members of the Committee or by one of their staff members.

Again, this is a modification from past practice to give access to transcripts of in camera meetings not just to members themselves but to one of their staff whom they can assign to go and observe that.

If there is a mover, we can debate it.

• (0940)

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I so move.

**The Chair:** It is moved by Mike Wallace.

Is there any debate? All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The motion is carried. Thank you.

On notice of motion, there has been some flexibility. Various committees have different timelines for serving notice of motion. This recommends 48 hours' notice, which is the standard.

Mike.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** The only addition that I experienced through the last five years is with regard to some people's definition of when the members should be notified and when the clock starts and so on, so I'd like to make one small amendment here to the last paragraph in the last sentence. It says:

the notice of motion will be filed with the Clerk of the Committee and distributed....

I'd like to add "on the same day the motion is received"

to members in both official languages.

That is assuming it is received in both official languages, of course, because that is when the clock starts.

If I happen to bring in a motion on Friday at 3:40, I'd like the clock to start that day. I think we should be notified that day that the motion has been received in both official languages in a legal.... My issue is that come Monday, if I've had a motion, some people might say, "We got it late in the day, so we didn't notify anybody until today, so the clock didn't start until that timeframe." I'd like the clock to start the day the thing is received.

**The Chair:** Okay. Well, the clerk might want to speak to that.

Why don't you explain to the committee how practical that amendment would be before we continue?

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In response to Mr. Wallace's comment, I have no objection. It will be my pleasure to send the notices of motion the same day they get to my office. That said, I wonder if we could agree on a deadline, from Monday to Friday. What if a motion is sent to me on a Tuesday evening at 9:15 p.m. when I'm home? I don't necessarily have access to my emails all the time. I wonder if the members of the committee could agree on a guideline that the deadline for sending the notice be 5:00 p.m., from Monday to Friday, for example. If the deadline is met, I will gladly send the notice of motion on the same day.

• (0945)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That certainly seems reasonable.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** And 4 o'clock seems more reasonable than 5 o'clock.

**The Chair:** Yes.

John.

**Hon. John McCallum:** So the idea is that it would have to be received by 4 o'clock, or 5 o'clock?

**The Chair:** Yes, let's say 4 o'clock. I think the mover of the amendment suggests 4 o'clock.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Okay.

**The Clerk:** From Monday to Friday?

**The Chair:** Yes, Monday to Friday, business days only.

I think that's reasonable, frankly.

Is there any further debate?

Peter.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** This is just a question, Mr. Chair.

I have no difficulty with the intent of Mr. Wallace's motion. It makes sense that members of the committee know what the content of the motion is. What many committees have done, though, is they have filed a notice of motion in a committee meeting. A member who reads out that motion then is considered to be providing notice to members of the committee for consideration at the next committee meeting, thus meeting that 48-hour threshold.

I'm assuming this practice will continue in this committee.

**The Chair:** I don't think anything in this motion would change that ordinary practice. I think all of the committees on the Hill meet

every second day, Tuesday to Thursday. If you submit your notice of motion today, by the time the next meeting is convened you will have satisfied the 48-hour notice. I think this is for the extraordinary ones, where you get an idea at 3:30 on a Friday afternoon, you fire it off to the clerk, and the rest of us don't get the advantage of knowing about it.

So I think that's reasonable. The motion, as amended by Mike, says that by 4 p.m. on the same day the motion is received, it be circulated to all committee members.

Is there any further debate?

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

**The Chair:** That does it for the pro forma rules or bylaws of our committee.

There's some interest now, while we're here—it's only ten minutes to ten—that we talk about future business. I might just introduce this reality that we're the first committee that's been convened by the House of Commons specifically to deal with the estimates. We have to give government the parliamentary approval to keep spending money over the summer recess. Therefore, they're only allowed to operate on Governor General warrants for 60 days after the writ has been dropped. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but that date is rapidly approaching.

The clerk has just reminded me, do you want to have this talk...? I think if we limit our talk to scheduling the meetings to deal with the estimates only, we can remain in public. If we want to talk about any future business, we might want to turn the cameras off and make this an in camera meeting.

How does the committee feel about that? Is there any interest in going in camera, or are we okay to keep this meeting public?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** First we have to talk about the scheduling of meetings.

**The Chair:** We're only talking about the estimates, I think.

I think it would be crazy for us to talk about—

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Are we going to be talking about people we're going to invite and all that kind of stuff?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Well, let's go in camera, then.

**The Chair:** All right.

There's a request that we go in camera.

**An hon. member:** Agreed.

**The Clerk:** You will need to suspend the meeting before we switch to in camera.

**The Chair:** Yes.

Hey, I get to use my gavel for the first time.

This meeting is adjourned, the first meeting of the government operations committee—

**The Clerk:** Suspended.

**The Chair:** Oh, okay.

This meeting is suspended.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

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