



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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PACP • NUMBER 001 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, June 15, 2011**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. David Christopherson**



## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Wednesday, June 15, 2011

• (1535)

[English]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Joann Garbig):** Honourable members of the committee,

[Translation]

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 official opposition. I am ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC):** I'd like to nominate David Christopherson as chair of the committee.

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Andrew Saxton that David Christopherson be elected as chair of the committee.

[Translation]

Are there any further motions?

[English]

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

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried and David Christopherson the duly elected chair of the committee.

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

**The Clerk:** Before inviting the chair to take the chair, if the committee wishes we can now proceed to the election of the vice-chairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the government party. I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

Monsieur Caron.

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** I would like to nominate Mr. Daryl Kramp as vice-chair.

[Translation]

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Guy Caron that Daryl Kramp be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

Are there other motions?

[Translation]

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

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried and Mr. Daryl Kramp duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

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

[English]

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Clerk.

I would like to nominate Gerry Byrne for second vice-chair, from the opposition.

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Daryl Kramp that the Honourable Gerry Byrne be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Clerk:** It is agreed. I declare the motion carried and Gerry Byrne duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

I will now turn the proceedings over to the chair.

**The Chair (Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP)):** Thank you very much, Joann, and thank you very much to the committee for the support.

I want to mention, if you will allow me, how honoured I am to chair this committee. For seven years I sat where Mr. Byrne is, alone on this committee, working as hard as I could and never imagining that I would have a shot at being chair because it would require being the official opposition, and that just didn't look as though it was going to happen.

There you go. Life unfolds, and here you are. I commit to doing the best I can.

I'm hoping we can return to the culture we had during the time of Mr. Williams and Mr. Murphy, when there was a minimal amount of partisan activity. Colleagues who were on the committee with me during those seven years will recall that when it was time to be partisan, we were partisan. We said we were going to be partisan. We got into the ugly mix of all that that means, and when we were done, we returned to doing the job we are here to do, which is to ensure that the accounts of the people of Canada are appropriately analyzed and that money is being spent properly. That is not partisan.

There is always a risk in doing this, but the person who has served second-longest after me on this committee is Mr. Kramp; we came on here back in 2004 together, and I want to thank him for his approach in the past. I hope we can continue that approach, even though we're a minority now. Without putting words in Mr. Kramp's mouth, the sentiment was that if there was something wrong, it needed to be said that it was wrong and we needed to find ways to fix it, regardless of which party was in power. If we follow that idea as closely as we can, we are going to be able to do some good work. I look forward to what we can achieve over the next four years.

That said, there has been some discussion, and I understand there is agreement that we should strike a steering committee, as we have in the past. The steering committee would consist of a non-voting chair and two vice-chairs, as well as a member from the NDP and an extra member from the government, meaning there would be five members on the committee. There would be a non-voting chair and four members: two representatives from the government side and one each from the two opposition parties.

Could I have a motion that a steering committee be struck?

Go ahead, Mr. Trost.

• (1540)

**Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC):** Chair, since I was not part of any discussion on subcommittees, I will be objecting to and voting against any subcommittee.

**The Chair:** That is your right. I have spoken to your whips, but that is your right.

**Mr. Brad Trost:** My whips didn't speak with me, and I vote for myself.

**The Chair:** Okay, fine.

Can I get a motion that we strike a subcommittee, a steering committee?

Go ahead, Mr. Kramp.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** I make that motion.

**The Chair:** We don't need a seconder. Is there any debate on the motion?

**Mr. Brad Trost:** Mr. Chair, I have served on committees both in opposition and in government. By and large, the majority of committees on which I have served—industry, natural resources, international trade—have not had subcommittees. In my experience, those committees have functioned well. I have served in both opposition and government; I have found in both cases that committees without subcommittees work well.

When I have been a substitute on committees with subcommittees, I have often found two things: one, there is a certain level of duplication; two, subcommittees do not always tend to speak for all members, as was pointed out today. I was not informed that my whips had any sort of discussion or anything. This is complete news to me. My understanding was there was going to be an open debate.

I, for one, have an independent streak, as you are about to find out, which is a good thing around here, although not everyone thinks so. I think it will sometimes speed things up if we don't have a subcommittee, because then decisions are final, all members are included, and some members would not be excluded. I will be voting against any subcommittee.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Hayes.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC):** As a new member of Parliament with significant experience on committees, I'm just trying to understand the purpose of establishing a subcommittee. It's my understanding that generally a subcommittee is established in the event that something comes up during the regular proceedings and it's determined that it's best to have a subcommittee established to deal with that particular issue.

At this stage of the game it seems like we're establishing a steering committee, yet there's no issue on the table, so I don't understand the need for a steering committee at this point in the game. I can see it perhaps happening at some time down the road, but I don't understand why we're having this debate right now.

**The Chair:** Okay.

If I may—and I'll go to Mr. Kramp and then Mr. Comartin—I'll say that in the past we've struck a steering committee to deal with a lot of the minutiae. Only recommendations come out of the steering committee; the recommendations will come to the full committee all the time. Quite frankly, anyone who can do simple math will realize that the government will win their arguments 10 times out of 10.

We deal with a lot of detail in terms of witnesses, lining up witnesses, moving dates around, and trying to do report writing when we don't have key witnesses who can make it. There are a lot of legal matters that we deal with and we'll do some of the background stuff there. They're all recommendations that go to the committee, and those meetings last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. The concern would be that if we didn't have the steering committee, then the 15 minutes to an hour that we spend at the steering committee would have to come out of our committee time, in that we'd be acting as a committee of the whole, if you will, because we'd all be dealing with it. I suspect that if it's a 45-minute discussion in steering committee, it's going to be a lot longer here because there are more people to participate.

So really, it's a facilitating committee. It's to deal with the details of what we have in front of us, to organize our work, because we have a lot of moving parts on this committee. It all comes to the main committee for our recommendation. The steering committee has no power in and of itself; it can only recommend to the broad committee.

Mr. Kramp, you have the floor.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** In my experience on this committee, I found a steering committee valuable. One of the reasons, of course, is that we don't deal with just one issue. We do not deal just with defence or just the environment or just foreign affairs. We deal with all of it. We deal with the Auditor General's reports, which run the scope from A to Z. As such, it takes a fair bit of organization every time you bring in a new topic or subject, or a new process of examination.

In the six years I've been on the committee, I've found that the steering committee has been effective. As Mr. Christopherson said, depending on the complexity of the issues coming forward, sometimes it has taken 10 minutes and sometimes an hour. No decision actually can or will be made based on the numbers in the steering committee, but certainly they would be a resource by which we would be able, hopefully, to make our meetings much more efficient and much more effective when we do have them.

This will enable us to have an opportunity not only to preview all the information that is there, but also to have a chance to discuss it with our colleagues, and it will help us to come into the regular meeting a little more prepared.

• (1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Kramp.

I have Mr. Comartin next. Mr. Comartin has not been substituted onto the committee, so I would need the permission of the committee to allow him to speak. Is there agreement?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Comartin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** I was counting up as I was preparing my thoughts on this. I think I've been on six standing committees since I was elected in 2000. With the exception of a short period of time in the public safety committee, all of them had steering committees. They were a major time saver.

I say that because of the one experience I had on public safety when we didn't have a steering committee. It seemed, as you suggested, Mr. Chair, that you ended up with everybody on the main committee putting in their comments. What would take 15 minutes in a steering committee would take an hour in a full committee. It's a major time saver.

I think the point that Mr. Trost raised, though, is a valid one, to this extent. I know there were committees where the division between the members, oftentimes because of personality clashes as opposed to ideological or philosophical ones, was so bad that whatever was determined in the steering committee ended up in full debate when it came for ratification to the full committee. So that was a waste of time, and I think if we had that kind of committee, I'd be on Mr. Trost's side.

The history of this committee, though—and Mr. Kramp has made this point—is just the opposite. The collegiality that has gone on in this committee was the same in the 2000-2004 period when we had a majority government. It was the same at that time.

In those circumstances, the steering committees work very well. They facilitate things. They save a lot of time for the full committee, so it's well worth doing, and I think this is one of the committees where it's appropriate.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As has been noted, it's been common practice on this committee to have a steering committee. Now, a past common practice doesn't mean there has to be a future common practice, and we recognize that. We had that discussion earlier today. What we are looking for is best practice.

We want to have this committee run as smoothly and efficiently as possible, and if having a steering committee will assist with that, then we're going to give it a shot. That was our discussion. If it turns out it's not working, then we'll have to address it at that time as well.

I think the comments that have been brought up on this committee so far, both for and against the steering committee, are all valid, but my recommendation is that we give it a shot and hopefully it will turn out to be of benefit to the committee as a whole.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I have no further speakers, but the floor is open if anyone wants it.

Seeing none, I will move to a vote on the motion.

The motion is on the establishment of a subcommittee. We normally call it a steering committee. It would be constituted of the two vice-chairs, one NDP representative, one Conservative member, and the non-voting chair.

That's the motion before you. We've had full debate.

All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The motion is carried, so we will have a steering committee.

The first order of business, I would suggest to the committee, if there is agreement here, is that the rules of our committee be the first matter that the steering committee take a look at next week, to make recommendations on our procedures.

For those of you who have been around for a while, it's the 48-hour rule, hearing information in a secondary quorum if we don't have a quorum—those kinds of things. We'll utilize the steering committee to chew on those and bring a recommendation back, and the committee will decide. Hopefully also at the steering committee we can get some sense of what we want to do when we come back in September so that we can land on our feet running and get to work.

If everybody is in agreement with that, then I will try to call that meeting next week and we'll have at least one steering committee before we rise.

Yes, Mr. Kramp.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** Mr. Chair, on the composition of the steering committee, are we doing that next week or are we doing that now?

**The Chair:** No—thank you for that—we will need to nominate and elect an NDP MP and one more Conservative MP. The two vice-chairs are automatic and I'm automatic.

I will actually take motions now for names from the Conservative side.

• (1550)

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** I would nominate Andrew Saxton from the Conservatives.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Saxton has been nominated from the Conservative benches. Are there any further nominations?

Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** I'd like to nominate Mr. Caron.

Sorry, is that...?

**The Chair:** I was going to try to deal with this in one piece.

Is there any civil war going on over here, any problem? No? Okay.

I'll take your motion now, Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** I'd like to nominate Mr. Caron as the other member of the steering committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Are there any further nominations from the NDP benches?

Hearing none, the motion is that Mr. Saxton and Mr. Caron be appointed to the steering committee.

All those in favour of the motion, please indicate.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** There's one last motion we have to do:

That the Committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

That is moved by Mr. Trost.

Is there debate?

Hearing none, all in favour, please indicate.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Is there any further business, Madam Clerk? Is there anything else I have to do?

All right.

Is there anything else the committee wants to do?

Very good.

With that, I thank all the members. I look forward to our work together. I will do my utmost to call a steering committee for next week so that we can get the process under way.

I thank you all very much, and I look forward to serving with you.

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

**The Chair:** This meeting stands adjourned.









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