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Monday, June 20, 2011

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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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•(1535)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Alexandre Roger): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

I must inform you that the clerk of the committee cannot receive any motions except the one to elect the chair. The clerk cannot accept any other types of motions and cannot entertain points of order or participate in debate.

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 any motions to that effect.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): I'd like to nominate Merv Tweed.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Blake Richards that Merv Tweed be elected as chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Merv Tweed duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Before inviting Merv Tweed to take the chair, if the committee so wishes, 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. I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): I'd like to nominate Jamie Nicholls.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Bevington that Jamie Nicholls be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any other motions?

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried. Mr. Nicholls has been duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member from an opposition party other than the official opposition. I'm now prepared to receive a motion to that effect.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): I'll nominate Mr. Coderre.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Sullivan that Mr. Coderre be elected second vice-chair of the committee. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Thank you, everyone, for your confidence in my ability as chair.

Traditionally, these first meetings are mainly organizational. I think everybody has a list of routine motions that were adopted in the previous Parliament, and I think if it's the will of the committee, we can establish these rules. That's probably the only business of the day.

We have in front of you the routine motions from the previous meeting. We are able to establish our own rules, too. This was put in front of you just to show you what took place the last time.

Go ahead, Monsieur Coderre.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have a suggestion.

Since there will certainly be discussions about the time allocated for opening statements, about who gets to speak and for how long, I suggest that we adopt all the other motions, except for that one, which we could discuss and move separately. We would save time that way.

•(1540)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Coderre has made a suggestion that we adopt the motions as presented. I'll open the floor for some debate on that.

We'll go to Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I believe that we should actually have a thorough discussion on each one for reference for some of the newer MPs so that they understand the process better. I would feel more comfortable going through them point by point.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other comments? Is everybody comfortable with that? I think it's not a bad idea to review them so that we have a full understanding of the rules as we move forward.

Monsieur Coderre, are you okay with that?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: We'll get to 6 p.m. quickly enough; that won't be a problem.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll start with the services of analysts from the Library of Parliament.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Do I need to read it, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Probably.

Mr. Jeff Watson: I move that the committee retain the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament as needed to assist the committee in its work. These services may be requested at the discretion of the chair.

The Chair: Comments? It's pretty much the same. The words may be changed a bit, but the implication is the same.

There are no bad questions. If you don't understand, just ask.

Is everybody comfortable with that?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll move on to the second item on the agenda, the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be composed of five members, including the chair, the two vice-chairs, the parliamentary secretary, and a member of the Conservative party. Quorum of the subcommittee shall consist of at least three members, and each member of the subcommittee shall be permitted to have one assistant attend any meetings of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. In addition, each party shall be permitted to have one staff member from a House officer attend any meeting.

Thank you.

The Chair: This is a little more than what is on your document. I think it should be open for debate.

Monsieur Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Could I see the French version of that motion, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: We have a standing rule that it is presented in both official languages. It is deemed to be so if it is read into the record, until it can be printed.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: I understand, but I didn't read it and I didn't attend any meetings before this one. I want to know what is going on, so I'd like to have a copy in front of me. I really appreciate my colleague's tone, but since I am a visual person, I would like to have the motion in hand to understand what he means.

I remind you that time flies. You'll see, it will be perfect. We're talking about a right.

[*English*]

The Chair: As it has been read into the record, it is deemed to have been interpreted. We would ask that the rules be written and distributed after the meeting, as agreed upon.

I could ask him to read it again.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, this is my sixth term. This is not the first time I am attending a committee meeting. The right thing to do is to provide us with the opportunity to look over the proposals, whether we're members of the minority or the majority. I have been a member of both the government and the opposition. We need basic decency for things to work. We don't have to play games. You have the majority anyway.

Basic decency requires you to provide us with your proposal or to meet with us first to discuss the matter, as we will have to work together for four years. I would like us to show good faith.

[*English*]

You have the numbers. You don't have to play games; it's okay.

[*Translation*]

I want to understand, and even the simultaneous interpretation was too fast. Out of respect for our colleagues, the interpreters, I ask that he reread the motion more slowly. However, next time, I would like us all to show good faith and talk to each other differently.

● (1545)

[*English*]

The Chair: I think that's good advice.

Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: With respect to the subcommittee, a composition of three Conservatives, one New Democrat, and one Liberal is a little out of my comfort zone. The subcommittee would in most cases act on consensus, but the voices would be better served in a ratio that better reflects the make-up of the committee.

The Chair: Mr. Albas, could I ask you to read it again, please?

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to say the point is taken. I'm sure that at some point I will learn to speak a little more slowly.

I move that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be comprised of five members, including the chair, the two vice-chairs, the parliamentary secretary, and a member of the Conservative Party; quorum of the subcommittee shall consist of at least three members; each member of the subcommittee shall be permitted to have one assistant attend any meetings of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. In addition, each party shall be permitted to have one staff member from a House officer attend any meeting.

I have one further point, Mr. Chair. I would like to point out to the member's previous statement that all subcommittees do have to be referred back to this committee, so they do get that full view of all the different sides.

The Chair: Is there further comment?

Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: First of all, quite clearly, if there's a quorum with three members and you have three Conservatives on that committee, you could have a quorum without any of the opposition there. I don't think that's the way we should be conducting business here.

My feeling about the subcommittee is that it's good to have some voices there, because the discussion is the more important part of the subcommittee. Certainly I would like to see the official opposition have two members on that committee and that the quorum be four members. So we would go to six members with a quorum of four members. I think that would answer the needs of democracy and of fair play.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): It certainly wouldn't be our intention to hold a subcommittee meeting without any opposition representation. As such, I think it's fair to suggest that we can add an amendment to the second sentence of the motion so that it reads, "Quorum of the subcommittee shall consist of at least three members, of which one will be a member of the opposition."

Does that help?

The Chair: Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: But it doesn't deal with the other issue. I think my proposal of increasing the subcommittee to six members would make that much more reasonable and would work in a better fashion.

The Chair: Before I recognize Mr. Albas, for reference, I will let you know that the last subcommittee was made up of four people.

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was going to move a very similar amendment to, I hope, help with the concerns from the other side.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Coderre, go ahead.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I have two comments. First, there was an election, and we have a majority government. Second, we have to

ensure that the subcommittee is not here to strike another committee. Rather, it must promote consensus on a series of agendas for future business.

We shouldn't panic and question the subcommittee's democratic nature. In any case, there is a vote afterwards in the whole committee. It all happens in committee, and you will get the expected results.

I would like us to sort something out together. Our role is to represent our fellow citizens and to be mindful when it comes to bills and relevant current issues. I don't think we need to appoint six, seven or eight members. Otherwise, we may as well strike two committees. Even when there was a minority government, we got along well, regardless of the committee. I have been a member of the Standing Committee on National Defence and the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. We went through the same thing, and it worked well.

I don't think that we necessarily need more members. Regarding quorum, let's make sure that members of the official opposition are present, since that's when they can use procedural manoeuvres.

I personally don't object to there being five members. However, let's not start appointing six, seven or eight members, because that could go on forever. We will apply the law of numbers and then identify the other issues. I think that we must ensure that we can arrive at a consensus on agenda in a subcommittee. After we achieve a consensus, we could discuss things further. Should something extraordinary happen between us, we could discuss it afterwards.

I don't think that this committee needs to start a numbers war. I'm prepared to support the original suggestion made by my colleague Mr. Albas. We could then certainly discuss the quorum and the time set aside for discussions.

• (1550)

[*English*]

The Chair: Are there other comments?

Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: In actual fact, we did have five members on the transport subcommittee in the last Parliament.

The Chair: Yes. I stand corrected on that.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: The standard, as I understand it, is four. Perhaps that would be the direction we should take, then, if we're worried about having too large a subcommittee: move it back to four and have that as the subcommittee. Then we can have the quorum at three and be guaranteed that there will be representation from one of the opposition parties. It's simple enough. That's parliamentary procedure. I'm willing to go along with the standard procedure as well.

In the last session we did have five, and I don't think it really caused us any grief, but this is a new configuration in Parliament and perhaps four is more appropriate. If the committee doesn't want to have a larger group, then let's have a smaller group.

The Chair: Well, that suggestion can be entertained. We are actually dealing with a motion and an amendment by Mr. Poilievre that would guarantee that at least one member of the opposition would have to be there to form a quorum of three.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Can that just be adopted as a friendly amendment? I don't think there's any opposition to that particular amendment, right? There's a broader debate, but....

The Chair: Your amendment...?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, just my amendment.

The Chair: You're suggesting that the quorum of three has to include a member of the opposition.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Yes: a quorum on the subcommittee shall consist of at least three members, including one member of the opposition. We're not seeking approval for the whole motion, just the amendment.

The Chair: Are there comments?

Is everybody okay with that?

Monsieur Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, we shouldn't forget that there are two opposition parties. There's the official opposition, but there's another opposition party as well. The Conservative Party and the NDP should not organize themselves to achieve a quorum. That would be unacceptable. When we sit on a committee, we represent all Canadian voters. We also represent our percentage of the vote. I can tell you that, in the past, everyone had the same amount of floor time, even if the number of MPs was low, percentage-wise.

If we want things to work properly, we should not remove a party from the quorum, so that we can proceed without one of the parties. The idea behind a quorum is for every political party to be represented, even if some of them have fewer representatives.

That could be done in time. I know that, if there's a vote in committee, my size won't change the fact that I have a single vote. It's important to point that out, so that things can work properly.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to relieve Mr. Coderre's concerns—obviously he is a vice-chair now as well, second vice-chair, and that really shows we want to work together—if he's concerned that the government will only speak with the NDP, he can rest assured that I'll be his new best friend and I will certainly talk with him any time.

•(1555)

Hon. Denis Coderre: You're not a socialist, right? Okay.

The Chair: I'm going to ask the committee to decide on the amendment, which would include the following: the quorum of the subcommittee shall consist of three members, one of which must be a member of the opposition.

All those in favour?

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

The Chair: That's carried. We're looking at the full motion now. We'll continue to have that discussion or we can move to the vote.

Are there comments?

The question is called, then. Shall the motion on the subcommittee on agenda and procedure pass? All those in favour?

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

The Chair: On reduced quorum, Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): On reduced quorum, we propose that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including one member from government and one member from the opposition. In the case of previously scheduled meetings taking place outside the parliamentary precinct, the committee members in attendance shall only be required to wait for fifteen minutes following the designated start of the meeting before they may proceed to hear witnesses and receive evidence, regardless of whether opposition or government members are present.

The Chair: Comments?

Okay, everybody. Then I'll ask if we are satisfied with the reduced quorum. All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Moving on to distribution of documents, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'd like to move that only the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute to the members of the committee any documents, including motions, and that all documents that are to be distributed amongst the committee members must be in both official languages. The clerk shall advise all witnesses appearing before the committee of this requirement.

The Chair: Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: If we can go through this, we can go back to the other item: time for opening remarks and questioning the witnesses.

The Chair: Yes, I'm sorry. I passed over that.

Are we happy with that?

All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Time for opening remarks and the questioning of witnesses. It's basically the same speaking order, I presume.

Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I move that the order of questions for the first round of questioning shall be as follows: Conservative, NDP, Conservative, Liberal. Questioning during the second round shall alternate between the government members and the opposition members in the following fashion: Conservative, NDP, Conservative, NDP, Conservative, NDP, Conservative, based on the principle that each committee member shall have a full opportunity to question the witness or witnesses. If time permits, further rounds shall repeat the pattern of the first two at the discretion of the chair.

The Chair: It also says that the tradition has been that we would give each witness ten minutes, or each representative of an organization.

Mr. Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, the NDP was always the third party in the committees I sat on in the past. We would begin with the opposition parties, that is, the official opposition, then go to the Bloc Québécois and the NDP, and finish with the Conservative Party. Therefore, I think it's unacceptable that we begin with the Conservative Party, continue with the NDP, go back to the Conservative Party and finish with the Liberal Party. You know that, when ministers are here for only an hour, we don't necessarily have enough time and we take some chances.

With all due respect, we should start with the NDP, continue with the Liberal Party and finish with the Conservative Party. It's a matter of acknowledging a system that has always worked. I understand that there is a single member who will have less speaking time. However, I want to remind you that, during the 37th Parliament, the Liberal Party of Canada formed a majority government and had 173 seats; the Canadian Alliance had 66; the Bloc Québécois had 37; the NDP had 13; and the Progressive Conservative Party had 12. On the Standing Committee on National Defence, everyone had 12 minutes to speak. The playing field was level.

I understand the numbers issue. I would like the Liberal Party to speak in the first round because we proceed by political party. Afterwards, in the second or third round, we could allow the Liberal Party to speak out of respect. Even in a minority government where there was only one NDP member on committees, we made sure that member would have the floor at least twice.

I think we need to be careful about that. I understand and accept the fact that all committee members have something to say, but I think that, in terms of organizing floor time, we need to respect every political party's right to speak. Since the Bloc Québécois is no longer here, there are three parties to consider. We should be able to even things out.

The goal is for everything to work while respecting the government's majority status and that of the new official opposition. Nevertheless, there is a third party. There are always ways to have more floor time. We are familiar with a few tricks my NDP friends have used in the past. I think it would be more fair to go with the NDP, the Liberal Party and then the Conservative Party in the first round. Afterwards, in the second round, we could adjust and ensure that we have the floor at least twice. Otherwise, with the witnesses, we'll never have the floor. That would not promote democracy or the usefulness of committee work.

I'm respectfully asking my colleagues to consider that. We're talking about a tradition, a way to proceed, whether in a majority or a minority situation. My colleague Mr. Richardson and several others are familiar with different governments. Regardless of what government was in power and despite the law of numbers, we have always worked in a balanced and respectful way to ensure that every individual and political party had the floor. Ultimately, there is nothing to be won.

● (1600)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Chair, with due respect to my colleague, in the last three minority Parliaments I don't remember the Liberals being that charitable in working with the opposition members and virtually having their way at committees.

Having said that, I offer something as a suggestion rather than a formal amendment or motion. It might satisfy the member to move the suggested first Conservative spot to the end of the first round such that it would read that the round of questioning shall be NDP, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative. That may give him greater assurance that the Liberals would have a full round of questioning should a minister appear.

I make that as a suggestion. Maybe it is something worth discussing.

The Chair: Although Mr. Bevington is the only carry-over from the other side, we always made sure the third party had a voice at the table. We had a rule that everybody here, as a committee member, should have a right to question, and if we run out of questions then we open the floor up to give other people a chance to ask two or three questions, if they so choose. But we felt, as Monsieur Coderre has said, that every member has the right and probably the responsibility to ask questions.

Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Well, I see that we may have a problem here if we're in a situation with the minister presenting. If there are 20 minutes of presentation with the minister's presentation in an hour, we may run into problems in the second round. I see Conservative, NDP, Liberal, Conservative, Conservative, NDP, Conservative, NDP, Conservative. Perhaps it would be fairer to start off the second round with the official opposition questioning on the five-minute questions. It would give us more assurances that the opposition got its time in within a one-hour witness presentation.

That's something that I would want to see in place. I think that's fair, too. There is some changing of rotation there between the Conservatives. As it stands now, the Conservatives will hold three out of the first five speaking positions in answering questions. It would be fairer to have the second round starting with the official opposition.

● (1605)

The Chair: Any comments?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: In the first round I don't see the problems there because there's time for everyone to speak regardless of order. The timeframe is just simply, okay, it will work. Everyone will get a chance to speak, and the Conservatives, holding the majority on committee, will have two chances to speak in the first round at seven minutes.

If we examine the previous time when the official opposition had the majority on committees, we had that opportunity. It's just that the second round should be lined up a little more for the opposition, in a spirit of fairness.

So if I could suggest that, the second round would start with the official opposition and then carry on, with the Liberals guaranteed a spot after the third NDP spot. I think that would be fair.

The Chair: Monsieur Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you.

[*English*]

When you talk about the first round, are we saying that we start with the Conservatives? You have a minister, and the first question comes from his own side? Usually, the first question has to come from the official opposition, and then the second opposition, and then you go on to the Conservatives. I don't understand why you would have the minister and then you start with a Conservative. Am I wrong? That's what I'm trying to understand.

Thanks for that second point. I agree with you, Dennis. But on the first one, you don't start with the Conservatives, you start with the official opposition when you have the minister in front of you, and then you go with the second opposition, and then you complete with the government, who can have all the planted questions it wants. The reality is that you don't start with a pat on the shoulder, you start with a question.

The Chair: Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Well, that is a point of debate rather than a point of fairness.

I'm okay with that if that's the tradition of Parliament. I've been here for five years, and I have noticed that the official opposition tends to ask the first questions of the minister. You're correct. That's the way Parliament acts. I wasn't sure whether that was simply a product of the opposition holding the majority of seats on the committee or whether that was a tradition that went beyond the five years that I was there.

If you go back to when the Liberals had a majority on the committees, did they get the first set of questions or did they not? That would be something that a—

Hon. Denis Coderre: I always started with the official opposition.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay. Well, then I would agree that we should start with the official opposition.

I was more concerned with making sure that the official opposition is well represented in the second round, where many times you run out of time for questioning. I think that's fair as well. That's why I spoke to the second round.

The Chair: Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Let me see whether this works. In both the first and second round, the proposed first Conservative speaker moves to the end of each round. Is that more what you're suggesting? So in the first round it would be New Democrat, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative. Then in the second it would be New Democrat, Conservative, New Democrat, Conservative, New Democrat, Conservative, Conservative.

• (1610)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: That's right.

The Chair: That would ensure that all parties would participate in the first round, and depending on the time... We're okay with that?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Just wait a second here. With respect, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you for lending me the floor.

The list as proposed in the motion ensures that every party gets a voice in the first round, and that thereafter questions are roughly distributed in proportion to membership on the committee. The fact that one member in this room is guaranteed a quarter of all the first-round questions is by itself quite generous. It guarantees that this member—I'm not pointing to any one in particular—will be guaranteed the opportunity to speak every single first round. There's not a single other member in this entire room who will have that privilege. Then you're saying that he would be guaranteed a spot in the second round as well.

An hon. member: We're not suggesting that at all.

The Chair: Basically, the next opportunity for him to speak would be after everybody else has spoken, or has given up his or her time.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you.

The Chair: Monsieur Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, in a committee, every member has the right to speak, but we have always allocated floor time by taking into consideration the political parties present. I don't need Pierre Poilievre's generosity. The voters are the ones who elected me. The purpose of a committee, when we ask questions or conduct studies, is to make sure that all political parties are duly represented, that they have the opportunity to share their perspective and to contribute to the proceedings based on their values and platform. You know how politics work. Everyone provides their point of view. It's not a matter of being generous, but of respecting British parliamentary traditions.

Regarding the first question, there has always been the official opposition and the second largest opposition party. We may want to resolve this situation now and ensure that every political party has the right to speak. The parties will then have to be able to assert that right, in consideration of the fact that the weight of representativity varies, regardless of the government.

You're too young to have witnessed this, Jeff, but when we were in power, we were generous. It wasn't much use, since we succeed in working together anyway. In the committee, we must be watchful and ensure that we do a good job. However, if the work is not being done, it can turn... I don't want to use any bad words, so as not to get the interpreters worked up. You may notice that I sometimes use my own expressions.

I just want to make sure that things work properly, Mr. Chair. I am familiar with your wisdom and your way of doing things. You have my full support, but I think that we also need to be respectful and ensure that every party gets to speak. We represent a percentage of the vote, a political party. Therefore, we have to strike a certain balance. I don't want to hear about generosity, since I have the floor in the first round anyway. Let's make sure that everyone gets to speak. Every political party should have that right. We're not here because of charity. Regardless of the number of MPs, all the political parties had the right to speak in every committee I sat on. Let's work towards that. We will vote without any problems.

Let's start with the official opposition and then move on to the second largest opposition party. After that, the government can ask its questions. In addition, if the government wants to have the floor twice in a row, I don't care, but that should be clear from the outset. The same goes for the second and third rounds.

[English]

The Chair: I'm going to summarize it, and if everybody is in agreement we'll move forward.

I'm going to suggest that the opening round consist of NDP, Liberal, followed by Conservative, Conservative, and then we go NDP, Conservative, until everyone has exhausted their questions. Then the floor will be opened up again for further questioning. I suspect it will be the same as in the past, when we never usually got past that second round in most instances.

• (1615)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Do I understand that there's only one round and then it's up for grabs?

The Chair: Every round will be determined by party with the Liberals going second in the first round and then waiting until everyone else has had a chance or given up their spot. So you will be in the opening lineup.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Let's vote on that.

The Chair: Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Chair, with due respect, I think the consensus position is New Democrat, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative in the first round.

The Chair: Whatever works, as long as we respect the fact that the Liberals are in that opening round.

Mr. Coderre.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I must say that I am in favour of what you said at first, that we begin with the NDP and the Liberals. What's the problem? You will get to speak anyway. We would still respect the fact that the opposition should begin and then be

followed by the government. We could keep going until 6 p.m. if you like; that's not a problem for me. Going to bed late wouldn't bother me. You will vote if you want to, but I really don't see what the problem is.

Even when the Bloc Québécois was here, they had the floor, which was then given to the NDP, and then to the Conservatives. We could make a big deal about this and talk about it until the cows come home, but let's have some respect for tradition.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Chair, just to end the suggested discussion around the table, let me move as a formal amendment that the first round speaking order be New Democrat, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative. There would be no ambiguity there.

The Chair: Comments?

Mr. Richardson.

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): I think it would deviate from traditional practice to do it that way. As long as I've been here—and that's a long time—it has always been that we have all of the opposition parties. In the previous Parliament we had the Liberals, the Bloc, the NDP, and then the Conservatives in the first round. That's always the way it's been. We always start with the opposition—all the opposition members—and then go to one Conservative member and then start the next round.

You've got a pretty good compromise now the way you've put it.

The Chair: Any further comment? We do have an amendment on the floor, which basically reads that the first round would be NDP, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative. Then we would alternate between the official opposition and government in the second and third until everybody has had an opportunity to speak or has given up their time.

Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: In reality, what used to happen was that I was the single member and we would go through every member sitting as a committee member, and then we would go back to the Liberals, the Bloc, and the NDP. So my turn would come after everyone had spoken and then in the order of the original sequence. It wasn't a case of...

The Chair: First identity or...

Mr. Dennis Bevington: It wasn't a case of simply going back to the NDP after everybody had spoken. It then started over again with the Liberals, the Bloc, and then the NDP speaking afterwards. So I think if we compromise in the second round by giving the Liberal party a position, as we have, it is very generous for a single member sitting in the opposition, compared to what we had in the previous Parliament.

The Chair: Right now that isn't being proposed.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: But it is, in the second round. In the first round, I agree with Mr. Richardson that it's part of tradition that the opposition parties speak first. If we accept the motion of Mr. Watson, then we're going away from tradition, which I think is not what we should do. This is not an important point, and to change for no good reason a tradition that has served us well is not the thing to do.

So I'd say that we should stick with New Democrat, Liberal, Conservative, Conservative as being very solid. It gives the Conservative Party two spots of seven minutes in a row, which I think is very good. There's a generous recognition of their majority on the committee, and I would hope that you would respect that. That would then give us a balanced approach to working on this committee.

But in the second round, every member must speak, and then the next order is for the parties to return to their previous order. So you would see that happen again, where it would be Conservative, New Democrat, Conservative, New Democrat, Conservative, Conservative, New Democrat, and then Liberal.

These are important points when you're in the opposition, because of course there's limited time for questions, and we all know how important questioning witnesses is, the timing of it. We have all suffered from not having enough time to question a witness fully, and I think that's why we are engaged in this discussion right now, because it is important. This committee is going to be together for four years, and we need to do this right and make sure it's done in a fashion that matches up to the tradition and the practices of the committee before recognizing the changing nature of the political representation on the committee.

So that's what I would say should happen here.

● (1620)

The Chair: Mr. Watson.

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

I raise two things for clarity, so we all understand what we could be voting on here. Can we have the clerk write out on the white board what the amendment would look like, and, if you will, even the second round, in terms of what has been moved and what has been suggested as an amendment?

The Chair: It's your motion, Jeff, and we're voting on it right now.

Mr. Jeff Watson: I know, but there are a whole lot of things going on here in terms of suggestions that are not exactly what we are talking about.

Second, Mr. Chair, if I may continue while that's being done, if I recall the way this committee functioned last time, it went Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, NDP in the first round, did it not?

The Chair: In the last session we went Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Conservative, back to Liberal, Bloc—because they had two members—back to Conservative, back to the Liberal for the third round, and then the Conservatives finished if...

Mr. Bevington is being very generous because I know in a lot of cases in the last committee you got one round.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: That's my point. Every member sitting around the table has to speak before anyone else gets to speak again. When you're a single person in a party on this committee, it would be unfair for you to speak before everyone else spoke, and it would also be unfair for you to get out of order once everyone else had spoken.

The Chair: Can everybody see that? The original suggestion was that it would go Conservative, New Democrat, Conservative, Liberal, and that would be seven minutes each. That would be followed by five minutes of everyone else who is at the table, until we get that complete, and then we start a fresh round. Mr. Watson has amended it by saying it should be...he has moved the C and the N back, so it's the New Democrats, the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Conservatives for the seven minutes, and then the same five minutes will apply.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Except the second round starts with the NDP.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: So it's not the same as above; it would be....

The Chair: Mr. Watson, is that what you...?

Mr. Jeff Watson: I thought I moved a correction to the second round—I stand to be corrected, mind you—to move the Conservative position to the end of that round as well. That's the principle, of course, that all members should have a chance to ask a first question before any member has a chance to ask a second question.

Mr. Chair, that's exactly how the committee functioned last time, in the sense that all members had the opportunity to ask a first question before somebody had a second question.

● (1625)

The Chair: Are there any further comments?

Monsieur Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chair, I find the first round to be totally unacceptable. We clearly cannot have flexible principles. Being a member of Parliament means something, just as parliamentary traditions mean something. In a constitution, conventions are also important. I would have stood up for that regardless of my seat; I have always done so.

I think that we should first give the floor to the NDP, then the Liberals and then twice to the Conservatives. It's clear that the second round will pass. However, we have to get back to what Dennis said about respecting the representativeness of political parties. Winning one battle may not win the war. Four years is a long time. Sometimes, there are procedural tricks, and it takes me a little while to understand. That doesn't bother me.

I want to thank my colleague Lee Richardson for having the decency to honour tradition. After all, we do have to work and live together. I respectfully ask that we change things, so that the floor is given to the New Democrats, then the Liberals and then twice to the Conservatives. We would begin with the official opposition and finish with the government.

[*English*]

You have the last word, for God's sake.

[*Translation*]

I think that we must work accordingly. I will then go along with the decision.

I agree with Dennis. I understand that those who were in my place felt alone and didn't speak often. I understand all that. However, I also remember instances when, even though we were 173, we gave equal floor time to everyone. The important thing is that the political parties represent our fellow citizens. Every party had 20% because there were five political parties.

If you want to play that game, we can play for a long time, Mr. Chair; that's fine with me. My mother gave me her amazing ability to speak, and my father did the rest. So, things are good for me.

With all due respect, I suggest that we begin with the NDP, then move on to the Liberal Party, and then give the Conservatives two opportunities to speak. I will go along with the rest.

[English]

The Chair: We will have to address this first before we can deal....

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I don't think there's a problem with that last proposal.

[Translation]

Unless I'm mistaken, Mr. Coderre is suggesting that we change the order of the first round so that the Liberals would take the floor before the Conservatives.

Hon. Denis Coderre: That's correct. We would have the NDP, the Liberals, the Conservatives and then the Conservatives again.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: That's okay with us, and I understand the same goes for the rest. In my opinion, there's no problem, since we're only changing the speaking order and not the number of times a member may speak.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Watson, do you have a final comment?

Mr. Jeff Watson: No. Should I withdraw the amendment, then?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: No, your amendment is fine. I'd be proposing an amendment to your amendment.

Mr. Jeff Watson: An amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: That's right, a subamendment to the subamendment on the subcommittee....

Mr. Jeff Watson: I don't think you can.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Apparently you can, and I'll give it a co-joint intervention by Monsieur Poilievre and Monsieur Coderre.

So what we have and what we will be voting on is that the sequence shall read: NDP, Liberal, Conservative, Conservative. We will go back to the NDP, Conservative, NDP, Conservative, until every member has had an opportunity to speak or has given up their time.

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: This is a question for Mr. Coderre. Does he accept Poilievre's generosity in this joint venture?

The Chair: I find that when you let conversations go on too long, sometimes they tend to get further away from what we're doing.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: He will learn, Mr. Chair.

I yield the floor to you.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

I have taken the liberty of changing it, and that is actually what we're going to vote on, if that's suitable to everybody at the committee.

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

The Chair: While we're there, we didn't really touch on witness time.

I'll go to Mr. Watson on rounds of questioning.

• (1630)

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Chair, I'll move that the witnesses from any one organization shall be allowed 10 minutes to make their opening statement. During the questioning of witnesses there shall be allocated seven minutes for the first round of questioning, and thereafter five minutes shall be allotted to each questioner in the second and subsequent rounds of questioning.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We've covered distribution of documents.

With regard to staff at in camera meetings, go ahead, Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Chair, I move that each committee member in attendance shall be permitted to have one staff member attend any in camera meeting. In addition, each party shall be permitted to have one staff member from a House officer attend in camera meetings.

The Chair: Everybody is okay with that? It's very similar to what we had in the past.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On in camera meeting transcripts, go ahead, please, Monsieur Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I move that in camera meetings be transcribed and that the transcription be kept with the clerk of the committee for later consultation by members of Parliament. I'm sorry, that should be "by members of the committee".

The Chair: Thank you.

We have a correction and it will be "for later consultation by members of the committee".

There seems to be a bit of a discussion around the word "transcribed" as opposed to "transcript". I'll ask my clerk to give us the difference as to what we're looking at, if he would, please.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: "Transcript" is a noun and "transcribe" is a verb.

The Clerk: That's exactly right. The "transcription" is basically what was said without being edited and without being transcribed into the other language. So basically what the clerk gets in his office is the blues, not translated. I just want to make sure that everybody understands that we will not be translating the document. It will be in one official language, the language that was spoken on the floor, and not the other.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: We have to make sure that the transcription is bilingual.

The Clerk: That's not necessary. It has always been done in just one language. We're talking about an internal House of Commons document that's not made public. It's kept in my office, and it's confidential.

Hon. Denis Coderre: That's not how it should be. We have seen news releases in the past, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: So it's okay as is?

• (1635)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Yes.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Next is on working meals. I put that in because the last time we did have a lot of meetings that carried over either the lunchtime or into the evening. I'll just read what I have here: that the committee hereby authorize the clerk of the committee, in consultation with the chair, to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals as may be required, and that the cost of these meals be charged to the committee budget.

Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On the matter of witness expenses, go ahead, please, Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to move that, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation, and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses, not exceeding one representative per organization, and that in exceptional circumstances payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the chair.

This is to recognize that we are in tougher economic times and we should tighten our belts where we can.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I move that 48 hours' notice shall be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, and that the motion shall be filed and distributed to members by the clerk in both official languages. Completed motions that are received by close of business shall be distributed to members that same day.

The Chair: Do we need to determine "close of business"? I would think that a motion submitted at midnight or at 11 would be...

Monsieur Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: We should make sure it is tabled before 5 so we can have a copy in the evening, instead of waiting for the next day. It really means the same thing.

Mr. Blake Richards: Are you saying 5 p.m.?

The Chair: And it has to be distributed that day. Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Is there anything else?

I think that is all there is for today's agenda. These minutes will be sent to you in reasonable time once they're translated. We look forward to the call of the first meeting. I'll advise the members of the subcommittee shortly as to when that will be.

Are there any other comments? I see none.

The meeting is adjourned.

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