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—
Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1540)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Georges Etoka): Good afternoon, honourable members. I see a quorum.

I must inform members of the committee that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions. He cannot entertain points of order nor 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 motions for the chair.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Good afternoon.

I move that my colleague the Honourable Denis Paradis be elected as chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Lefebvre that Mr. Paradis be elected as chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): I think my colleague Mr. Bélanger wants to speak.

The Clerk: I believe I understood that Mr. Bélanger is nominating Ms. Lapointe as chair of the committee.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Clerk, may I speak?

The Clerk: Yes, madam, if you are not moving a motion.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: In fact, I would like to decline. I very much appreciate Mr. Bélanger's nomination, but I think that Mr. Paradis would do a very good job.

I sincerely thank Mr. Bélanger for his confidence in me.

The Clerk: Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and invite Mr. Paradis to take the chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): First of all, thank you very much for your confidence in me. In my opinion, this is an extremely important House of Commons committee.

We had planned to elect only the chair, but with your agreement, we could immediately proceed to the election of the vice-chairs, so that the committee can start its work quickly.

Is everyone in agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Excellent.

We will now proceed to the election of the first vice-chair, who must be a member of the Conservative Party.

Are there any motions?

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): I nominate my colleague Mr. John Nater, who is present here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I congratulate Mr. John Nater on his election as first vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: We will now proceed to the election of the second vice-chair, who must be a member of the NDP.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): I nominate Mr. Choquette as second vice-chair.

The Chair: Mr. John Nater moves that Mr. François Choquette be elected as second vice-chair.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

• (1545)

The Chair: Congratulations, Mr. Choquette, on your election as vice-chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: There are no further points on the agenda.

I will see to it at the Liaison Committee that we review the budget for our committee. If you are all in agreement, we could at some point meet in various regions of Canada. I want to mention, in particular, that Darrell Samson has invited us to come and eat lobster in Cape Breton. We could travel there. That would have to be reviewed and authorized by the Liaison Committee. The financial aspect has to be settled.

We will be working on some very important files, such as the 150th anniversary of Canada. I think that there will be a very collegial atmosphere among members of the committee and that working on it will be quite pleasant.

Thank you very much.

We will now deal with the routine motions that will allow the committee to operate.

The first motion reads as follows:

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.

Could someone move the motion?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I invite the analysts to come and sit down.

Welcome.

The second motion deals with Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, and reads as follows:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be composed of five (5) members, including the chair, the two vice-chairs, and two members of the government; the quorum 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 the whip's office attend any meetings.

May I have a mover?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): I am Darrell Samson, from Nova Scotia, and I so move.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): I would like a clarification.

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Mr. François Choquette: I am going to quickly reread the motion on the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure.

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be composed of five (5) members, including the chair, the two vice-chairs, and two members of the government; the quorum of the subcommittee shall consist of at least three (3) members; each member of the subcommittee [...]

The motion refers to two members of the government. Is that standard procedure? Would it be possible to have only one?

The Chair: Pardon me?

Mr. François Choquette: It says “five (5) members, including the Chair, the two vice-chairs, and two members of the government.” That means two additional members, clearly.

I simply want to know if that is standard procedure.

The Chair: The government traditionally has a majority in the subcommittee.

Mr. François Choquette: Very well.

The Chair: So there is the chair and two members of the government, and two vice-chairs who are not members of the government.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): That is how we have always done things.

The Chair: The motion has been moved by Darrell Samson. Do Paul Lefebvre or Linda Lapointe second the motion?

An hon. member: The motions do not need to be seconded, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Oh, I see.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: We must not forget Mr. Mauril Bélanger.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion deals with the reduced quorum:

That the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four (4) members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the government.

Mr. Mauril Bélanger moves the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1550)

The Chair: The next motion concerns the distribution of documents:

That only the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members only when such documents exist in both official languages and that the clerk shall inform the witnesses of this requirement at the time of the invitation to appear.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion is on working meals.

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion is about witnesses' travel and living expenses:

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two (2) representatives per organization; and that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the chair.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion deals with the presence of staff at in camera meetings:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff person at an in camera meeting and that each party be allowed one additional staff person at such meetings.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion deals with transcripts of in camera meetings:

That one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee.

Mr. John Nater: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion, which is very important, is about notices of motions:

That 48 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration; and that the notice shall be deemed effective if received electronically by the clerk of the committee by 4 p.m. on the second business day prior to the date of the meeting and that it be distributed to members the same business day.

Mr. François Choquette: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion is about time limits for witnesses' statements and questioning, and states that at the discretion of the chair, witnesses be given ten minutes to make their opening statement. The motion states that the first round of questioning will proceed as follows: Conservative Party, 6 minutes; Liberal Party, 6 minutes; NDP, 6 minutes; Liberal Party, 6 minutes. The second round of questions will be as follows: Liberal Party, 6 minutes; Conservative Party, 6 minutes; Liberal Party, 6 minutes; Conservative Party, 5 minutes; NDP, 3 minutes. This amounts to 50 minutes in total.

May I have a mover?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I so move.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, I would like to say something.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: I know that other committees have decided to have 7-minute interventions for the first round of questions.

Would the committee be willing to consider that?

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I know that in the other committee I belong to, the Standing Committee on International Trade, we have chosen to work as proposed in this motion.

The Chair: Is that still a problem for you?

Mr. François Choquette: No, there is no problem.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion is about televised meetings. It states that the meetings with the Commissioner of Official Languages and any minister be televised if possible.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We have dealt with a lot of topics today.

Are there any further points the members would like to raise?

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, I sat on the Standing Committee on Official Languages from 2009 to 2011 with my colleague Mauril Bélanger, who is here. We studied the roadmap, the one that is still in effect, I believe. If I am not mistaken, it will be in effect until 2018. In order to facilitate the research work of our personnel, would it be possible to add to the agenda of our next meeting, which will take place next Monday, that we are going to

begin to study that roadmap, or at least to review its objectives? That will of course require a few meetings. I would like us to do an overview of the roadmap in question. I think that would be important.

I am back at this committee after being away for a time, like Ms. Boucher. Mr. Nater, however, is a new member. Mr. Choquette was also once a member of the committee, if I am not mistaken.

Mr. François Choquette: No, not of this committee.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Since there are several new members on the committee, it would be important to update everyone on the roadmap.

The Chair: That is fine.

I was going to suggest that at the first meeting we choose which topics we want to discuss, and establish a timeframe. We could certainly begin with the topic you mentioned. Other members of the committee have also suggested other topics to me.

From now until Monday, I invite you to reflect on the topics the committee could study, so that our time here is well spent. Earlier I mentioned Canada's 150th anniversary, which we would look at from the perspective of official languages. There are some very important topics.

Let's make that the first order of business at our first meeting, next Monday. We could also examine the priorities in a smaller group.

Yes, Mr. Bélanger?

The Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.) (via text-to-speech software): The translation seems to have broken down and I don't understand why. Have there been too many staff cuts? Why?

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you for raising that issue, Mr. Bélanger.

Translation in Ottawa, in Parliament, in all our committees and across the government apparatus as a whole is certainly a topic we must consider in this committee. I think that everyone is in agreement to make that one of the topics we study in the near future.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would like to add something, Mr. Chair, about the funds allocated to the committee. You mentioned that it would be important for the members of the committee to be able to go and meet stakeholders in person, on the ground in all regions of Canada. It would be good to determine the timeframe for those meetings now. I certainly like the idea of going to see Mr. Samson and having some lobster, but we can't go there simply because we want to eat lobster.

The Chair: You are quite right.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: We have other reasons to go and meet with people, and we have to work out a schedule. If the committee decides to visit all of the Canadian regions, it is important that we plan this carefully.

The Chair: Thank you for your comment. The message will be conveyed to the clerk. As soon as we have determined a timeframe for travel to the various regions of the country, I'm going to ask him to ensure that measures are taken for the House to grant us the amounts needed for these trips.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would like a clarification.

Mr. Boissonnault, who is here, is the parliamentary secretary to the minister responsible for official languages, if I am not mistaken. I expect he is with us to ensure that the committee functions well?

The Chair: That is correct. The parliamentary secretary is not an official member of the committee. That was a change brought in by the new government. He is not a member of the committee, but rather an observer. It is a great pleasure for us to have Mr. Boissonnault take part in the committee. He is present, but he does not have the right to vote.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Will he attend all of the meetings?

The Chair: Yes, but not as a member of the committee. This is a new practice we have decided to adopt.

Mr. Boissonnault, did you want to say a few words?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

I welcome all of you to your committee.

I am an observer here. I will attend all of the meetings. I am not entitled to vote. I will only have the right to speak when someone shares their speaking time with me. If ever there is some pressing matter I absolutely want to share with you, I will ask for one or two minutes of your time in order to speak.

We have work to do together to ensure that the government respects its official language obligations, and to foster the vitality of official language minority communities in Quebec and elsewhere throughout the country.

I look forward very much to working with the members and the senators.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boissonnault.

Are there any further questions?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Boissonnault is here as an observer, but will he also accompany us when we travel?

The Chair: I did not look into that. Since he is not a member of the committee, his expenses would not be covered by the committee's budget.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That is true. However, he is the parliamentary secretary.

The Chair: If the committee decides to invite the parliamentary secretary on one of its trips, he will have to get his money elsewhere.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Very well.

I asked the question because I too have been present here as parliamentary secretary. There has been a big change. I simply wanted to know if the parliamentary secretary would be coming with us when we travel.

The Chair: You wanted to know how things would work.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes.

In the past, we used to travel.

The Chair: If at a certain point we invite Randy Boissonnault to accompany us as observer on one of our trips, the committee will not be paying for his expenses.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: He will be there as parliamentary secretary.

The Chair: That is correct.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Fine.

The Chair: That is the situation. Perhaps the clerk could confirm that.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, does that mean he's going to have to pay for his own lobster?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, I would simply like to make sure that we have approved the rotation that determines the members' speaking time. Earlier, one member suggested that people be given 7 minutes rather than 6. The motion carried. However, is the total in the document still 50 minutes?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Samson. We agreed to limit speaking time to 6 minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: So it will be 6 minutes, then 5 minutes, and 3 minutes.

The Chair: It is 6 minutes, then 5 minutes, and then 3 minutes at the end of the second turn. It is set as such out in the document that is before you.

● (1600)

Mr. Darrell Samson: I simply wanted to make sure that it had definitely been accepted.

Thank you.

The Chair: This has been a terrific first meeting. Once again, I thank you very much for your confidence in me. We will see each other again next Monday.

Thank you, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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