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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): Good morning. I call the meeting to order.

This is meeting number nine of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in the first session of the 42nd Parliament. This meeting is being held in public.

Following from last week's appearance of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, our business today is a discussion of what, if any, work the committee wishes to undertake regarding the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons.

The commissioner sent in a letter and attachments outlining her priorities, etc., as we requested, which were distributed to the committee members yesterday afternoon. As mentioned at last Thursday's meeting, we are in public now, but we may decide to sit in camera depending on the issues we're discussing.

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Before we move to that, I wonder if we could get an update on the minister's availability.

We've made two requests now, and we've been put off by the minister. It really seems as though the minister is making every effort to avoid the committee. I hope she's had a change of heart and is going to make an effort to be here and answer for some of the decisions that are being made. Can you give us an update on that?

The Chair: I'll get the clerk to do that. I forgot to mention that I'd like to save 10 minutes at the end for readjusting the schedule a bit because of various appearances.

Would you like to report on the minister?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Joann Garbig): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The minister's office has confirmed that she and senior officials will appear for one hour on Thursday, March 10.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Did they give a reason for not being present today? As I think you know—and I'm not referring to the clerk here, or the chair, obviously—we felt it was crucial to be able to ask her about the phase 1 Senate appointment process before it's expired, because of our constitutional concerns. It's all over by March 10. What's the pressing need that made it impossible for her to come today?

The Chair: I wasn't involved, so the clerk can answer that.

I have Mr. Christopherson on the list.

Mr. Scott Reid: Could you give an explanation as to why she's not available?

The Clerk: The minister's office had simply informed us that she had been given notice of cabinet meetings which conflicted with the committee's meeting time.

Mr. Scott Reid: That was Thursday. Are you saying for today as well? Remember that last week I intervened, and we went back and asked if she could come today if she couldn't make it Thursday.

The Clerk: This was not possible, and my instructions were then to inquire about a date when she would be available to appear.

Mr. Scott Reid: They indicated she wasn't available today for sure?

The Clerk: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, that's all I wanted to know.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): I want to underscore that when I agreed to support this motion, I said exactly this was my concern. I saw all the sincere, earnest looks on the part of the government, and “Oh, no, we wouldn't do that.” I can't point to that and say she's deliberately dragging her heels, but I have to tell you that it's not like this wasn't predicted, and that was the problem with leaving the motion open-ended where it said “at the minister's availability”.

Madam Clerk, when did we originally invite the minister? When was that decision made?

The Clerk: I can check.

Mr. David Christopherson: Would you check that while I'm talking? I believe it's been at least a few weeks, and by the time the minister gets here, I have to believe that will have been a month. The whole thing was time-sensitive; there were deadlines to this issue. The motion, as I understand it from the official opposition, was to try to get the minister in before some of those critical deadlines, or at least as close to them as possible.

I just want to underscore that I did say, if you check the blues—not that anybody cares—that there's a good chance we're going to be in this situation, but I'll trust them anyway. I hear everything they're saying. However, the reality is that here we are again, and it's not unlike what we experienced with the last government, which is why I was so worried. I just underscore again that this government talks a great game about change, but we sure have to fight to get them to change any one little thing from the way it used to be done back in the dark ages in the last Parliament.

Thank you.

The Chair: The clerk says it was February 4.

Mr. Chan is next.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): I just simply had a question for the clerk.

I believe the last time we scheduled the Chief Electoral Officer to appear was on March 10. Are we still proceeding with that? I think the Chief Electoral Officer wanted two hours. With the minister's appearance and now that we know when she's available, is there an implication with respect to what we'd previously scheduled?

The Chair: We were going to discuss that at the end of the meeting, but I think....

We've asked the elections officer to find another date so that we can get the minister. We'll talk at the end of the meeting about when we'll have the elections officer, etc., because of these changes. We're just jiggling things around.

I guess the other thing you can think of during the meeting—it gives the staff in the back something to do—is the new item you have in your mail. It's with regard to the estimates. There's a fairly tight timeline for when we're allowed to do that before they're approved by default. Keep that in mind when we discuss the schedule at the end of the meeting.

Is that okay, or do you guys just want to do that now? Since you brought it up, maybe we'll just get that over with.

The clerk will give you a schedule that you can write on. You may have it already. They'll just pass it around so that we can write in what we're doing.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): I note that for procedure and House affairs, the Parliamentary Protective Service is our only reference. When do we have to deal with that? What's the deadline to react to that in terms of the estimates?

• (1110)

The Chair: It's related to the last allotment day. I don't think we know what it is yet.

For the estimates, it is as follows:

...no later than three (3) sitting days before the final sitting of the supply period ending March 26 (Monday, March 21, 2016) or three sitting days before the last allotted day in the current period (which has not been allotted yet).

We don't know when the last allotted day is.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Then we don't have to deal with it today.

The Chair: No, we don't have to deal with the estimates today, but if we want to do it, we have to do it soon.

For the Thursday meeting, it depends how long we take today on conflict of interest; otherwise, the first hour would be in the Valour Building. We're doing a video conference with Daniel Jutras for one hour on the appointment to the independent advisory board.

Mr. Blake Richards: On that one, Mr. Chair, were there not two or three other appointees? I see we only have one name. Why is that?

The Chair: He was the only one available that day. The other ones are later in the schedule only because they weren't available now. We had wanted to have them both at once, actually, so we'll have another hour there. We talked about having committee business—Mr. Christopherson's motion—in that hour, or we could put something else in there.

For March 8, we were thinking of moving Elections Canada there, right?

As you see on the schedule, we tentatively have another order in council appointee, and initiatives towards our study, but Elections Canada is available that day. They're not available a lot of other days, so my suggestion is that we actually put Elections Canada in there. Otherwise, I think it's way into April when they could come.

Then we'd move those other two items later on.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Chairman, how do you view the time sensitivity of Elections Canada?

The Chair: It's just a briefing on the most recent election. It probably would be good for us to have that knowledge as we look forward to electoral changes and things coming up, but it's not overly —

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, exactly. I only ask because we're in the beginning of a four-year majority term. We don't want to get too far away from it. We want to deal with it when it's fresh, but given that there are things pushing against it—i.e., bringing in that witness—it seems to me that the priority would be going with that witness and pushing Elections Canada off, even by a month or two, if we have to. We have time on our side on that file.

Believe me, there's a whole lot of work to be done on that issue. Normally what happens is that the Chief Electoral Officer returns with a whole series of very time-consuming recommendations that we need to go through. That briefing is just the beginning of a rather longer process flowing from the last election.

The Chair: My understanding is that of the reports he does, this is a factual one. Then sometime around June he'll do the one with all of his recommendations.

Mr. David Christopherson: That's where we roll up our sleeves. This is a courtesy visit or a background visit. I would suggest that if there's anything within what we're looking at that is flexible, this is something we could move around without losing anything.

The Chair: Is there anyone else on that point?

Okay. We'll leave March 8 as you have it on your schedule, with the order in council appointment. Then we'll have the caucus reports on the family-friendly initiative before we forget what our caucuses said. I assume each party will have someone bringing that report from their caucus, or bringing someone from their caucus.

The next day would be Thursday, the 10th. We have the minister for the first hour. Then we could have initiatives toward the.... Did the Elections Canada person want an hour or two hours? Okay, it was two hours.

We have to discuss the witness list. We could do it on the 8th, because the 8th is the deadline for you to submit ideas for witnesses. After the family-friendly caucus reports to our committee, the clerk will have a huge list of witnesses that we have to winnow down. We have to decide how many meetings we want witnesses for and pick the witnesses from that list. If we have time, we can do that March 8. If not, then we can do that in the second hour on March 10.

• (1115)

Mr. Blake Richards: The minister is only indicating one hour of availability on the March 10. Is that what we understood?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay.

It's disappointing, obviously. We asked for two hours, and I don't think that's an unreasonable request, given the magnitude of some of the changes that we're talking about here. I'm sure there will be a lot of questions for her.

Could we not at least have the officials remain for the last hour of that meeting so that we could put any other questions that might be necessary to the officials at least?

Mr. David Christopherson: That's not unusual.

The last government was adamant, and the Liberals before them, usually, on the one hour. That was the window we got. It wouldn't be unusual, though, for us to have the minister for an hour and then continue with officials for a second hour. I'm pointing out that it wasn't unusual to do that in previous times.

The Chair: We can ask the minister. From talking to the clerk, I know there certainly wasn't any suggestion of that by the minister, but we'll ask.

If not, we'll leave what we have on the schedule you have in front of you. As for the witness list for initiatives for the family-friendly subject, if we haven't finished that on Tuesday, then we'll winnow down the list. If we have done that on Tuesday, we'll pick a couple of witnesses to see if they can come on that Thursday if we're not having ministerial staff.

Does that sound okay to everyone? Okay.

Now we're on to March 22. March 22 is budget day, which traditionally is in the afternoon. Normally committees often carry on their meetings in the morning.

What's the will of the committee for budget day?

Mr. Scott Reid: It's highly unlikely that we'll have this room available to us. They tend to take rooms for budget lock-ups, so we'd have to move off site.

The Chair: That's right.

Does the committee want to meet in another building on budget day or not?

Mr. David Christopherson: Probably not.

The Chair: Okay. We will carry on that meeting.

If we were doing that, we would have witnesses for our study that day. We also have to decide when we're going to schedule the estimates. I think we only need an hour for that. Traditionally I don't think we've taken more than an hour. We'd have the clerk—do the Clerk and the Speaker normally come?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Can we do the estimates on budget day?

The Chair: Yes. Whether that's a busy day for the Clerk and the Speaker, I'm not sure, but we can ask them and see, and if not, let's try them the other day that week. That's one hour on the 22nd—whichever hour is more convenient for the Clerk and/or the Speaker to come before us on the estimates—and in the other hour, we'd hear witnesses. If they can't come that day, we'll hear witnesses for the whole day, and on the 24th we will have an hour for the Speaker and/or the Clerk on the estimates, if they're available.

• (1120)

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm kind of overhearing a little of the conversation you're having, and I recognize the problem that would be there as well.

Maybe I could make this recommendation. We are hoping to have the second of the appointees for the Senate advisory board on March 8 in the first hour, correct? So that we're not running into this trouble with the deadline for the estimates, could we maybe consider using that second hour of that day for the Clerk and the Speaker, and then the 22nd would become a planning day for the family initiative study.

The Chair: Okay, yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: For our whole business in the second hour of the 10th, we would have the officials stay back when the minister is not willing to be here, and then the 22nd would become the time when we would discuss caucus reports and plan for witnesses. We could just make that a full meeting of planning for the study, and then begin on the 24th.

The Chair: Okay, and if the officials aren't available, we can move forward some of that—

Mr. Blake Richards: They will be, but if they're not, we....

The Chair: Is that okay with everyone? Does that make sense?

Mr. Blake Richards: Just while I have the floor, there's one other thing I would suggest.

It's with regard to the meeting this Thursday, as well as the meetings on the 8th and 10th. I see you have the minister being televised, and I believe that when we had the chair of the advisory board here, we had a televised meeting. We should probably extend the same courtesy to the two other appointees, so for this Thursday's meeting, as well as the meeting on the 8th with the two Senate advisory board appointees, we should have televised proceedings for those two appointees as well.

The Chair: You have to remember, though, that they're both appearing by video conference, and the only place you can video conference and televise is at 1 Wellington, so we would have to move over there.

Mr. Blake Richards: I think it's important that the same courtesy be extended to them, so if that's what is required, I think we should do it.

The Chair: Are there any comments on that?

Mr. David Christopherson: Maybe we could do the conferencing over at the Valour Building.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: But we couldn't televise at the same time.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm not sure about that, but okay, it doesn't matter.

The Chair: Then we go to 1 Wellington for Thursday's meeting and the March 8 meeting. Then the second hour on March 8 will be the estimates. Then the first hour on the Thursday will be the minister. The second hour might be the officials; if not, we would move up the caucus reports and the planning of the study, and then whenever all that stuff is finished, we'll move on with the study for the rest of that week. That takes us up to March 24.

Are there any other comments on agenda?

Go ahead, David.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I have a technical question. Is it possible to have this thing on an ongoing basis on the committee mobile page? I don't know if it's a technical possibility.

The Clerk: Yes. There are times when it changes frequently and rapidly, and I do my best to keep it up to date.

The Chair: That's the agenda we'll go with so far. That's the draft of the ever-changing agenda.

We'll go now to our discussion about whether we do anything related to the changes to the conflict of interest code, partly pursuant to the commissioner's priorities, which she has sent us and you got yesterday, or anything else that people have that is related to that conflict code.

I'll open the floor to anyone who would like to start discussions on this matter.

●(1125)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: This is just a quick comment. As a committee, do we need to approve the changes she made to the forms?

The Chair: Oh, yes. Let's do that. That's a good point.

We'll take a motion from Mr. Reid that we, the committee, approve the two forms.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. David Christopherson: One of the recommendations that the commissioner made was:

That the requirement for approval of forms and guidelines by the House of Commons upon recommendation of the Procedure and House Affairs Committee set out in section 30 of the Code be removed.

I didn't know whether this is a good time to jump into that one, since we're actually dealing with it. I just raise that point.

The Chair: We could vote on this, because it's happened in the past, and then we'll deal with that motion and decide for the future.

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

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, do you want to lead the discussion on that one?

Mr. David Christopherson: There's probably an argument to go back to the beginning and start at the first one, rather than pull this one out of sequence.

The Chair: Do people want to go...?

This isn't the limit of what we can discuss. These just happen to be her preferences. Maybe we should have a quick discussion as to whether or not we do anything. Are we going to make some recommendations?

Since we approved the forms, I have to report that to the House. Does anyone have a problem with that?

Do you go to House leaders' meetings, Mr. Reid?

Mr. Scott Reid: I do.

The Chair: Could you suggest that somehow the Bloc should learn about our reports, so they don't deny them all without at least knowing what they're denying?

Mr. Scott Reid: That's a good point. I noticed that you got shot down. It was obvious that it was from the Bloc side, but when they did the all-party consultation, they didn't bother.

What happened the second time? Did you just wait until there was no Bloc member in the House?

The Chair: Our whip talked to them and explained the report, and they agreed to leave the House.

Mr. Scott Reid: You would be the most frequent victim of this, given the number of reports we generate here. It will eat up all your time.

Mr. David Christopherson: Call Joe, after all the times that Joe would stand up, get shot down, stand up, get shot down.

Mr. Scott Reid: There were only four Bloc members then.

Mr. David Christopherson: To be fair, it wasn't always the Bloc doing the shooting.

Mr. Scott Reid: I would know nothing about that.

Mr. David Christopherson: No, you wouldn't. No.

The Chair: Okay, so we're going to take that report. Maybe we'll have a brief discussion of whether or not we do anything on the conflict of interest code before we get into the nitty-gritty details.

Are there any comments?

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: If we're going to look at this and do something with it, I don't know that it's appropriate to begin with some recommendations and start deciding one way or the other without the committee having some of the background, context, and information that would be required to make those kinds of decisions. We heard from the commissioner, but we might want to hear from some other witnesses and get some more background, information, and opinions on some of these types of changes before we start making decisions about them.

The Chair: Maybe we should hear from the caucuses, too.

Mr. Blake Richards: That would probably be advisable, I would think.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I know that the evidence was taken in camera in the last Parliament. It would be helpful to at least have the opportunity to review that evidence. Maybe we could go in camera just to review the evidence—not to make any comment about it, but just to know what was on the table. Then we could come back in public. Alternatively, we could have an opportunity to review the transcript from the clerk's office, but I would like to know what was under consideration by the 41st Parliament.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Without violating the confidentiality of what happened, I can say that it was not really that we took evidence per se. There were no witnesses presenting before us at these in camera meetings. It was internal discussion.

It's largely a matter of going through transcripts. I would recommend that you allot a reasonable amount of time for just reading through the record. Also, like all transcripts, it tends to wander around in a somewhat undirected format.

• (1130)

Mr. David Christopherson: You can blame it on me.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's not on you in particular. All of us were guilty.

I'm sure our clerk has already thought of this, but it might be a good idea to organize the transcripts so that if someone comes to your office to look at them, they would know which ones to go through and could take those to a desk in the corner or something.

The Clerk: Thank you. I'd just like to point out one thing.

The committee has a routine motion in effect currently that says that members can review an in camera transcript in the clerk's office. However, when we think about going back to a previous session, members who are currently members of the committee but were not members of the committee in the previous session do not have an automatic right to view those transcripts.

The Chair: Mr. Reid is next, and then Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. Scott Reid: There must be a technical workaround, if that's the case. We could adopt a motion or something that will let us go forward

Mr. David Christopherson: We can do anything by unanimous consent. If we agree unanimously that we want to have them, we can do that.

Also, while I have the floor, Mr. Reid is offering very sage advice when he talks about the time commitment. There's a lot there, because the discussion was free-ranging. We were working together, trying to find solutions.

I've never seen it done, but I think we should be open to examining the transcripts at this session, because what's going to happen, Scott, is that we're going to come here, and half of us will not have done it and will have memory of it and will be playing with that, while some are going to go and actually read it because that's their work ethic. Then there are others who will come in and kind of skim over it because this isn't their priority committee. It's going to create a different knowledge base, which is exactly the opposite of what you're trying to achieve.

I'm trying to work with you. I don't know if there's some way to bring them forward, but perhaps we could take 20 minutes at the beginning of the meeting to peruse them, or do it section by section. Your point is well taken, but if we're going to go to the extraordinary length of pulling confidential records from a previous parliament to make them accessible, we ought to make sure it works, that's all.

Those are my thoughts.

The Chair: I guess another consideration is whether the Bloc will give us unanimous consent to do that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Is it unanimous consent of this committee, or is it the House?

Mr. David Christopherson: No, it's this committee.

Mr. Scott Reid: I think we're getting an answer to this right now from the experts.

The Chair: Could you answer that question? Does this committee have the authority to bring forward those confidential statements before all of us, including the ones who were not on the committee before?

The Clerk: What I could suggest is that if the committee wants to make an agreement that those transcripts be produced for the committee's review in an in camera meeting, then I would do that.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I've read most of these recommendations and I don't have a problem with most of them. However, my issue at the end of the day is that I would like to have a full understanding of why it was bypassed and what the substantive concerns might have been.

I have a few concerns in a couple of these items about the breadth of what the conflict of interest commissioner is asking for. However, above and beyond that, a lot of it seems reasonably sensible to me, so I want to understand the rationale for why these recommendations were not moved forward. I'm not saying there weren't legitimate reasons, but that's what I'm trying to get to the bottom of.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson was suggesting that if we do a study on this, we do that in the first 20 minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson: I guess so.

I put that out as a thought to work with, Chair.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: That's if we can do it in 20 minutes.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, I don't recall ever going through it this way. It doesn't mean we shouldn't do it, but I don't have a precedent to apply that I can recall.

The Chair: The clerk says there's a large volume of material.

Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Just for clarification, how many meetings were spent on this? How much testimony are we talking about?

Mr. Scott Reid: None of us were at all of them. That's something else. If you were really being a stickler for it, I don't think any one of the three of us was at every single one. Sometimes Mr. Scott was there instead of yourself. I know sometimes I wasn't here.

Mr. David Christopherson: I was chairing another committee at the time, so I was away often.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes. It's a lot. The other thing is that there is a system to it, but it's not that systematic. We jumped around a fair bit.

I think the first thing that makes sense is to have a meeting. I don't think 20 minutes will do it, but 20 minutes will let us get our heads around the problem.

I don't know for sure that this would happen, but common sense suggests we'll then find ourselves dealing with only a part of the code. Then we'd only be dealing with part of the transcript of material.

That's what I think would make the most sense.

• (1135)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: There are 10 recommendations that were accepted by the committee that are in the report. Do we have a copy of that report? I haven't seen it in our binder.

The Chair: I think it was approved by the House committee. It's all done.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Oh, it's approved, so that's already been finished.

There were 13 recommendations that were not accepted. My interest would be to understand what the rationale was for the committee not to accept those 13 recommendations.

If there's a part of the transcript that deals with those 13 specifically, would it be possible to pull that part out of the testimony and just look at that? I think most of us are interested in knowing why those recommendations were not accepted so that we can then reflect on the reasons.

Mr. David Christopherson: Everything has to be put in its time and context, so one of the things you will find is that we were running out of time in the last Parliament. The Parliament was grinding down, and the election was within sight.

There were two reasons that we would sometimes set things aside. One was because it was incredibly complex or not as straightforward as some might like to think. As well, the day-to-day experience of some members changed substantively.

I think what you're mostly focusing on is why they disagreed when it seems at first blush that they make some sense. That will be there, but you will also find that some things weren't dealt with just because they required a longer discussion. They may not even have been controversial, but we were desperate to get a report out. We were really worried that we would have gone the whole damn Parliament and not met our obligation at all.

That's why we said, "Look, we have this unfinished work. It is important. It's not right to just ignore it. Let's at least take a stab at finding the things we can agree on," what we call the low-hanging fruit.

Anything that was controversial and/or required discussion and looked as though it wasn't going to be agreed to easily would just be set aside. Then we agreed to go back and revisit those, but by the time we had finished all the others, it was all we could do. We just said, "Okay let's call it a day. We've got something to put in. We're all in agreement. It's going to go through the House. It won't be an issue and it will make some important changes. Let's do that."

We all agreed. We did that. We had the election. Now we're here.

Some of it is not because it's necessarily a bad idea. It may just have taken more time than we had to invest in it to talk it through.

The Chair: If I could sum up, there seems to be agreement to look at this and study it at some time in the future. For the first bit of the meeting, which would be in camera, the clerk or researcher would get us that large volume of documents so that people could look at them, and we would then carry on the discussion.

Is that generally what I'm hearing?

Mr. David Christopherson: Chair, the confidentiality aspect is important, because the documents reflect—think about yourself in the future—what you were saying when you expected no one else was going to read it except everyone in the room.

I would suggest that maybe we have enough copies for everyone to work with. Then we can collect the copies again and leave them with the clerk. Then, as we want to refer to them during our meeting, we could pull them out and have them, but nobody would walk out of here with a copy. That would not be acceptable.

The Chair: While we're all in agreement on it, for when we do that, could I get a motion to do exactly what you just said? We would have the documents available, and it would be mandatory that they be returned. The meeting will be in camera, and it will be mandatory that they be returned to the clerk before we leave the room that day.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes.

The Chair: Is that all right?

Mr. David Christopherson: Also, they should be numbered and identifiable, so we know the one that was handed to Christopherson that he has to hand back.

The Chair: They'll be numbered. Good. That's fair.

Is there any opposition to that motion? All in favour?

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

The Chair: Because things keep coming up, maybe when we get closer to the end of the month that we've already programmed and we see what has come to our table, we can decide more of the timing.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, it's one of those things that is going to be around for a bit, folks.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

• (1140)

Mr. Blake Richards: I assume the same will apply to the Chief Electoral Officer as well, and that when we get closer to that month, we'll set aside a date with him at that point.

The Chair: That's a good point. We'll ask about his next availability after the dates we've already programmed. That's good.

The researcher is suggesting that we also do a formal motion to bring to committee all the documentation that was under study in the previous study of the conflict of interest code. That's moved by Mr. Christopherson. Is anyone opposed?

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

An hon. member: Do you need a wheelbarrow?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: That's great. We have, in theory, finished today's business, which means that we could get something else done, if that's okay with people. We could maybe go on to Mr. Christopherson's proposal. We can't really do witnesses, because people have till March 8 to submit their witnesses for the list, which is already pretty large, but we could....

Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Could I suggest that we just discuss informally what we're thinking so far and go in camera?

An hon. member: You mean about witness lists.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Just on witness lists. I don't think it's terribly controversial. You understand what I'm getting at. We already kind of said it on the record last time. I'm not talking about voting on it. It's just to signal where we're coming from with regard to the witnesses on the family-friendly initiative. I don't think it's terribly controversial, but I think we should talk about it in camera. We'd just go off the record, that's all.

The Chair: Is it okay to spend a few minutes on it? Obviously there's going to be a lot of discussion later, but if there's something we can get out of the way now, is that okay?

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I just want to make sure that the reason we're going in camera to talk about witnesses is we're talking about members and their circumstances. We need to have a good rationale for going in camera, other than just wanting to.

Mr. Arnold Chan: It could affect members' privileges. There are those kinds of issues. Once again, we're not voting on who's coming or not coming. I just want to table what we're thinking.

Mr. David Christopherson: The issue, based on your campaign record and what we believe in, is that moving from a public meeting to an in camera meeting is something that matters, and I just wanted to be clear. I'm quite prepared to do that. We haven't settled those other things, but that won't come into play here.

I'm in agreement. I just wanted to put the rationale on the record. The reason is that we're talking about members, their personal circumstances, and their privileges and rights. If there's any chance that we might violate those, let's go in camera, given the nature of what we're doing. There's no decision-making or anything, so—

Mr. Arnold Chan: We'll say that if there is decision-making, we'll come back to a public meeting if it's controversial. Is that okay?

Mr. David Christopherson: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. Is everyone is agreed to go in camera for a few minutes?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll have to suspend for a minute to get that done technically.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• (1140)

(Pause)

• (1205)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

The Chair: We've just moved back into a public meeting after being in camera.

Go ahead, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Are you referring to your notice of motion? We understood there was some discussion about some proposed changes. I don't have a black-lined version of that. Is there a black-lined version of some of the proposed changes to Mr. Christopherson's motion?

The Clerk: Yes, I have a revision based on what was last before the committee.

Mr. Arnold Chan: We'll take this offline. I'll speak to David about this. We'll follow up where we were chatting about it before. Thanks.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm always ready to make peace.

The Chair: I was reading the sexual harassment policy that was approved near the end of the last Parliament, I think, and in it there are references to PROC that must remain in camera, so that should probably be on our list, just because it's the law.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I had proposed a bunch of amendments, and I think that was one of them.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Scott Reid: Can you give us more context?

The Chair: When you joined up as an MP this time, you had to sign a sexual harassment policy. It is a very long policy, but in that policy it says that under certain circumstances, the case comes to PROC, and if it comes to PROC, it has to be in camera.

I'm just reflecting the reality, so that we don't contravene a law.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I had added that, actually, to Mr. Christopherson's list. It was one of the amendments that I had proposed.

The Chair: Do you want to circulate copies around the room so that people have it?

•(1210)

Mr. Arnold Chan: Yes.

The Chair: But we're not discussing this now, right?

Mr. Arnold Chan: No.

The Chair: Okay. Let me check on our long-term list of things that PROC normally deals with.

We have some people here who go to the whips' and House leaders' meetings. Are there any items that any of the parties had thought of bringing forward to this Parliament or that might come before this committee that they could think of off the top of their head?

Mr. Arnold Chan: Mr. Chair, I think I also had a substantive motion with respect to this committee rendering an opinion on Madame Labelle. I'm prepared to defer that motion. I would suggest that we might hold off until we've had the opportunity to examine the other two federal witnesses, and then I might consider amending my motion to dispense with all three in one shot, if that's acceptable to my friends on the other side.

My motion called upon this committee approve the appointment of Madam Labelle as being competent to serve on....

Mr. David Christopherson: Oh, yes, and Quick Draw McGraw there ended the meeting before you got to the motion that we had gone into overtime to deal with. Yes, I recall that.

Mr. Arnold Chan: My suggestion was simply that I would defer that motion until we've had the opportunity to examine the other two witnesses. I think that would be fair to everyone. We can discuss it at that time. I'm sure it will be interesting.

The Chair: Is there anything else?

Mr. David Christopherson: Anybody who understood that reference is getting old, by the way.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Yes.

The Chair: Are there other things people want to discuss at this meeting?

I guess you get a sense of my modus operandi as chair. When I do those psychological tests, they show that I am task-oriented. Regardless of what anyone's agenda is, I just like to get things done and have some production from this committee. Otherwise we will be wasting our time. I think we're doing great on that, but that's just so people know where I'm coming from as I make decisions.

I would like to have some great things come out of the committee. I think we have been doing well. We're moving along quickly. We've done a lot of things. I think that's good.

Mr. David Christopherson: As long as you're not going to psychologically test us, it's all right.

The Chair: Is there anything else anyone wants to bring forward?

Someone can move that we adjourn, if there's nothing else we can dispense with and get done.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I so move.

The Chair: It has been moved.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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