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Thursday, February 20, 2020



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• (0905)

[*English*]

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

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, and cannot entertain points of order or participate in debate.

[*Translation*]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the official opposition.

[*English*]

I am now ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): That will be our side.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): I will put forward a motion that we choose Mr. Tom Lukiwski as chair.

The Clerk: Mr. McCauley has moved that Mr. Lukiwski be the chair of the committee.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: This is despite my reservations, and I'd like to put that on the record as well.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Clerk: Your reservations are noted.

Are there any other nominations for the position of chair?

Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: It is agreed that Mr. Lukiwski is elected chair of the committee. I'd like to congratulate him and invite him to take the chair here.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)): Let me first offer my most abject apologies for being late. It's not a very sterling way to start off a new chairmanship, but thank you very much. It's good to see so many of you familiar faces again. It's very good to see some new faces here.

For those of you who don't know me, I am Tom Lukiwski. I've been a member of Parliament now for six terms. This is my second go-around as chair of this committee. For new members, I can assure you that this is a very good committee to be on. There are some very bright and industrious people, and we've done, I think, some excellent work in years past. We've written a few very good reports, and I look forward to receiving more good reports and good work from this committee.

Once again, my apologies, but thank you so much for your confidence in me. I'll try to live up to it as we move forward.

I think the first order of business is to elect a couple of vice-chairs.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): I have a point of order on that.

I'm wondering if it might please this committee that we defer this until after PROC has met and allow its process to take place. If we have the will of committee to do that, it might allow us to get into our regular business, after those decisions are made there.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and it's a good point. PROC is still seized with this and they have been discussing it. My understanding is that certain committees have already gone forward and elected some vice-chairs, perhaps not all. It's up to the will of this committee whether we wish to elect vice-chairs at this point in time, defer that decision or whether we move on and try to deal with something like routine proceedings.

Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Would we not be able to select vice-chairs now, and then if PROC decides to go forward, we could add the other one?

The Chair: For the benefit of everyone—I think everyone here is aware of it—some of the committees have elected vice-chairs but deferred the decision for a third vice-chair until PROC brings down their decision, if that is going to happen in certain committees.

If you would like, we can do that. We can elect the two vice-chairs and leave the possible election of a third vice-chair until our colleagues at procedure and House affairs have finished their deliberations. Would that make sense?

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: In that case, we'll go forward with the election of the two vice-chairs, and we'll open this for nominations.

• (0910)

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'd like to nominate Francis Drouin for the vice-chair position on the government side.

The Chair: First vice-chair?

The name of Mr. Francis Drouin has been put forward. Are there any further nominations?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Congratulations, Francis.

Now we go for a second vice-chair.

The Clerk: If the committee wants to, yes.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

The Chair: In that case, we'll open for nominations.

Mr. Matthew Green: In what might be an unorthodox way, I'd like to put my own name forward. I'd be remiss if I didn't, and I don't actually have somebody to do that on my behalf, but I would like to put my name forward for the second vice-chair.

The Chair: Certainly, this is within the parameters and the context of what we do here, so that's not out of order at all.

Are there any further nominations?

I'm sorry, I should know this, my bad for this. Could we have, for the record, your name?

Mr. Matthew Green: For the record, my name is Matthew Green from the wonderful riding of Hamilton Centre.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green's name is put forward as second vice-chair.

Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): I would like to nominate Madame Vignola.

The Clerk: The Standing Orders allow that in the event that there are more than two candidates for a position of chair or vice-chair, the vote has to be conducted by secret ballot.

The only thing I would ask now is whether there any further nominations for the position of second vice-chair.

Seeing none, we're going to conduct a secret ballot election. My colleague and I are going to prepare the ballots and hand them out to you. We will have a ballot box; then we will walk it around, and everybody can put the ballots in.

If you will just bear with us, we will get that ready right now.

The Chair: We will suspend for a couple of minutes until the ballots are prepared.

• (0910)

(Pause)

• (0915)

The Chair: I will now call the meeting back to order. My understanding is that the ballots have been collected and tabulated.

Mr. Clerk, could you give us the results, please?

The Clerk: Having tabulated the votes, I declare Julie Vignola to have received the majority of votes.

The Chair: Now, with that concluded, colleagues, I will confer with my clerk again, but I believe the next order of business would be to adopt some routine motions.

Most of you are familiar with this process, but for the benefit of some of our newer colleagues, what we are about to do is establish what we call routine motions concerning how we conduct our normal day-to-day business, particularly when there are witnesses in front of us.

For example, in previous Parliaments we have had a system whereby, as an example, witnesses before this committee would have a maximum of 10 minutes to speak, at which time questions would follow. Sometimes we've had a seven-minute allowance for questions for the first round of questioning, followed by five minutes in the second round, and so on.

This Parliament is a bit unique since 2015, inasmuch as we have four registered parties rather than three. In the last Parliament, the routine proceedings for this committee gave seven minutes in the first round, allowing two members of the governing party to be heard, I believe, then one from the official opposition and one from, at that time, the third party, the NDP. In the second round there was one from the governing party, one from the opposition and, I believe, a two-minutes slot for the NDP.

In this case, since we have four parties, we can establish our own routine motions.

I am going to ask the clerk to give us a couple of examples, before we go to Francis—or I'll ask the clerk eventually—of some of the routine motions that have been adopted by other committees, and perhaps we will have some suggestions as to the routine motions and speaking order in this Parliament.

Francis, the floor is yours.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We have a few routine motions that we would like to suggest, and I have copies for committee members in both official languages.

The Chair: We'll distribute them. I'll ask everyone to take a look at them, and then we'll have a brief discussion, led by our first vice-chair, Mr. Drouin.

Colleagues, I believe everyone has received a copy of the proposed routine motions that Mr. Drouin has distributed. Since Mr. Drouin was the one who brought forward this proposal, I would ask him to lead us in the discussion.

Francis, perhaps you could take us through it point by point.

• (0920)

Mr. Francis Drouin: I certainly can, but I would defer to my fellow committee members whether or not there are currently any objections to those motions. The one on the analysts speaks for itself. Unless we want to write our own reports, I am pretty sure we would appreciate having the analysts here.

Mr. McCauley, do you have...?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Do we do these individually or the whole thing?

Mr. Francis Drouin: The whole thing. It would be easier to proceed.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: The only thing I would suggest is that, under the motion on “Independent Members—Clause-by-Clause”, it goes (a), (b), (c), and then (a) again. But the second (a) is the opportunity for an independent member to “make brief representations” in support of their own amendments. The only thing I would ask your opinion of is whether we should quantify what “brief” is, so we don't get someone thinking that “brief” means 15 minutes, as opposed to my own way of thinking that “brief” is three minutes.

I'm just looking for feedback from you folks.

The Chair: If I may, Mr. McCauley, for clarification the convention has been that it's up to the discretion of the chair. There's never been a finite or a....

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay. If we stick with that I'm perfectly comfortable with it.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: There is one I want to address, namely, on reduced quorum. I am wondering if we could take a look at that to include two members from the opposition and two members from the government.

Are we going line by line or were you looking to adopt it as a whole package?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Drouin had suggested that we look at it as a whole. Perhaps now it might be better to just go item by item if there are some specific items.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We can. We're ready to entertain amendments; if Mr. Green has certain amendments we can certainly entertain them. After that, if there are no issues with the other routine motions, then we can adopt them as a block. I'm fine to go through them one by one. I don't have objections.

The Chair: If everyone has had enough opportunity to read the proposed routine motions, why don't we try to see if there are specific amendments that one would like to propose? We can deal with them then vote as a block.

Mr. Green, you have a question under reduced quorum.

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes, I move:

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and publish evidence when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four (4) members are present, including two (2) members from the opposition and two (2) members from the government

I believe the rest would be in line with what has already been presented.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: From our side we're okay with that particular amendment.

The Chair: Seeing no opposition, do we have agreement?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Adopted. Thank you.

Mr. Matthew Green: And two of the government, that is correct.

The Chair: And two of the government, yes.

Good catch, Steve.

Mr. Francis Drouin: No wonder you're PS.

The Chair: That's why you get the big bucks.

Are there any further amendments to the proposed routine motions?

Madame Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): I don't have an amendment, but being new to this place, I'd like to take the time to go through each one. I know it's longer and not very pleasant, but it'll go quickly if there aren't any amendments. It will help me get everything straight.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's a fair point, and I do want to make sure that all new members in particular have an opportunity to participate fully.

So why don't we do that, Francis? It should only take us a couple of extra moments. I think we can breeze through them fairly quickly because many of them are fairly self-explanatory.

Starting with “Analysts”, go ahead Francis.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin: We put forward the motion on the analysts because we aren't the ones who write the reports. We need analysts for that. They are the institutional memory. In fact, at the back, I see one who is this committee's institutional memory.

That is why we moved that the committee retain the services of analysts, who will support us in our work.

[*English*]

The Chair: All those in favour of the motion on analysts as written?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

Under the subtopic of “Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure”, go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

• (0925)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Once again, we have operated with subcommittees. In the past, Mr. Lukiwski, we've operated through subcommittees, and we've operated through non-subcommittees. We had a good working relationship with this particular group that we had in the past. It's just whether we choose subcommittees to provide an agenda to committee. Again, this is very routine with other committees.

The Chair: Again, for the benefit of our new members, most other committees do have subcommittees. From time to time the subcommittee, in whatever form it has taken, was unable to come up with a clear consensus on a path forward, at which time the chair would take back the discussion and some of the questions to the full committee for consideration. But the subcommittee is a method in which we can, many times, set agenda items without bothering the entire committee, and then it comes to the fully committee and we're in full flight.

Again, all in favour of the motion on the subcommittee on agenda and procedure as proposed?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Drouin, on “Reduced Quorum”, we have an amendment that we've already passed.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Exactly.

The Chair: Next is “Questioning of Witnesses”.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin: The chair referred to procedure. The idea behind this motion is to give witnesses appearing before the committee 10 minutes for their opening statements. Even then, it will depend on how many witnesses we have. It is up to the chair to determine whether we have enough time to hear from all the witnesses. It also deals with the number of rounds of questioning and the time allocated to questioners from each party.

The Chair: Ms. Vignola, you have the floor.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: If I understand correctly, then, each party has six minutes during the first round.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Again, for the benefit of some of our newer members, particularly the representatives from the Bloc and the NDP, for your information, in the previous Parliament, in the second round, the representative for the NDP had two minutes. This is actually giving you an extra 30 seconds each—

Mr. Matthew Green: That's very gracious.

The Chair: —and reducing the amount of time from the government or the opposition.

Mr. Matthew Green: A lot can happen in 30 seconds.

The Chair: It certainly can.

Do we have any further discussion?

All in favour of the motion on questioning of witnesses as proposed?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Drouin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin: The next motion deals with document distribution, and this is as much for my anglophone colleagues as my francophone colleagues. It is important to make sure that all documents are available in both official languages.

[*English*]

So it's making sure, when we distribute documents to our committee members, that they're in both official languages.

The Chair: Again, for the benefit of our new members, from time to time we've had witnesses appear before this committee with not only their oral testimony but a written brief to accompany that. The odd time, they've only brought those written briefs in one official language. We are unable to distribute documents that are in only one official language, so we must require that any documents for distribution to this committee be in both official languages.

Is there a question?

Yes, Madame.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Must we give 24 hours' or 48 hours' notice of documents to be distributed?

[*English*]

The Chair: We do, but it's not germane to this particular item on the routine proceedings. For example, if there are motions brought forward, presented by members of this committee, there are some timelines associated with this. This is simply to deal with the documents that we plan to distribute for whatever reason.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We'll cover it later.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay.

The Chair: All in favour of the motion on documents distribution as presented?

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

The Chair: Francis, please continue.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We move on to working meals.

I'm actually surprised that Mr. McCauley didn't put an amendment in there to include doughnuts.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Francis Drouin: Committee hours will be changing in the future, as they always do. It's up to us to decide what types of food we want.

Again, it's just a routine motion to allow us to proceed, if we choose to.

The Chair: Francis is right that committee times change from parliament to parliament. This committee is now meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. Other committees meet in the late afternoon. Some meet in mid-afternoon. Depending on the time of day, from time to time the clerk, on the advice of the members of this committee, determines whether meals are to be served and what they would be—sandwiches, full meals, hot meals, breakfast meals or evening meals. If we just leave it like this, in consultation with our clerk we'll make determinations as seen fit when it comes to the type of food you will be served.

If you have any complaints, you can complain to the clerk.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: All in favour of working meals as proposed?

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

Next is witnesses' expenses.

Mr. Drouin.

• (0930)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Again, this is very routine. We want Canadians to participate in our studies. All committees often pay for expenses for them to either show up here or move into a special room when they're a lot further from Ottawa and can't be here physically.

The Chair: Once again, we will continue to follow this practice. We have been very conscious, at least at this committee level, of trying to curb expenses and not incur unnecessary expenses. It means, for example, that from time to time, or maybe even as a routine practice, rather than fly witnesses in to appear publicly we try to establish video conferences and try to keep the costs down. In all cases, we do want to make sure that witnesses who have been requested to appear before this committee have the ability to do so, and our committee will incur the expenses for those appearances.

All in favour of the motion on witnesses' expenses as proposed?

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

The Chair: Thank you.

Continue, please, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: The next one is for staff at in camera meetings. I suppose it makes the chair's job much easier when we require only one staff member per office, and one from the House officer's office, to be present when we have in camera meetings. Often we will meet and we will have witnesses. Sometimes we'll have an in camera business meeting shortly after, so sometimes you can see some lurking around.

I'm sure this makes your job a lot easier, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: There has been the odd occasion when we've had requests from some members of this committee, whether on the government side or the opposition side, to relax the rule to allow more than one staffer. We've dealt with that on an individual, one-by-one basis, but if we can adopt this, that would ensure we have some continuity. One staff member probably should be sufficient for each party and each member here.

Do we have agreement on the motion on staff at in camera meetings?

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

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, next is in camera meeting transcripts.

Mr. Francis Drouin: The goal of this particular motion is to make sure that what happens at in camera meetings stays in camera. The clerk always has a copy of the transcript. Again, this is just to make sure that the information provided in camera stays confidential and inside those four walls.

The Chair: All in favour?

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

The next one is the notice of motions. This is something that I would ask particularly new members to listen to attentively.

Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Again, it's very routine in terms of how we've operated on this committee. It's 48 hours' notice. You may want to pay attention to what 48 hours' notice means in this committee. I can read it if you want, but I think it's pretty self-explanatory.

The Chair: All I would ask is that you understand the notice requirements and the deadline for filing notices, which is 4 p.m.

Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): I have a quick question. Can you specify whether it's 48 working hours or 48 hours?

A voice: It's two sleeps.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: But before 4 p.m.

The Chair: That's correct.

All in favour?

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

Mr. Drouin, on independent members. We've dealt with this.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We have.

The Chair: Are there any further amendments?

Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a motion regarding in camera proceedings.

I move:

That any motion to go in camera should be debatable and amendable, and that the committee may only meet in camera for the following purposes:

- a) to discuss administrative matters of the committee
- b) a draft report
- c) briefings concerning national security;

And furthermore, minutes of in camera meetings should reflect on the results of all votes taken by the committee while in camera, including how each member voted when a recorded vote is requested.

• (0935)

The Chair: If I may interject, I'm going to make a recommendation that we consider this, although we've already passed the in camera meetings routine motion as presented. However, in deference to you, Mr. Green, you are a new member, and you have presented this in both official languages I presume?

Mr. Matthew Green: I do appreciate that. The reason I didn't bring it up as an amendment at that particular time is that it related to staff at in camera meetings and in camera meeting transcripts. It wasn't presented as an in camera topic, per se.

The Chair: That is a separate motion, so we can't consider that.

I would ask all members if they've had an opportunity to read the proposed change, and to make comments if they wish.

Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I have a couple issues with (a), (b), and (c). When we're discussing administrative matters, does that include witnesses?

The other point I'd like to make is on confidentiality. That is not reflected in the motion. We as a committee may choose.... For example, if we have whistleblowers come before the committee, they may not want to be portrayed in public. That's not necessarily a matter of national security, but it's a matter of confidentiality, so I would ask that we include confidentiality in there as well.

The Chair: Francis's point is fairly germane, because in the last Parliament we completed a study on whistleblower protection. On several occasions, we've had witnesses come forward wanting to give testimony, but who have been quite concerned that their anonymity might be compromised. Therefore, we've made sure to grant confidentiality and anonymity to those witnesses who so desired. It would not be a bad thing to include that in the body of this motion.

Are there any other comments?

Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Would the clerk be able to comment on how this would impact our meetings procedurally, and if in fact this is something that other committees are contemplating adopting?

The Chair: Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: This motion has been moved in certain other committees. Certain committees have adopted it. I believe some have adopted it even with amendments made to it.

The question I have about this is where it states that "in camera meetings should reflect on the results of all votes taken by the committee while in camera". I'd like some clarification from Mr. Green, if he could provide it. What level of detail does he or the committee suggest that should include? For example, when the committee drafts a report, if there are 100 paragraphs in the draft report, and the committee takes a decision on each and every paragraph, is that the kind of information you would want revealed in the minutes?

Usually, with a draft report, even if it's considered in public—though it's rare but it has happened—we don't reveal all of that information. My concern is that if we were to do that for a report with 100 paragraphs, it might slow down the process of the committee working its way through the report, because in each paragraph, there are....

One potential amendment motion could be "with the exception of proceedings on a draft report", for example.

An hon. member: Sure.

The Clerk: Is that an amendment you would be amenable to?

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes, it sounds like a very practical and reasonable amendment.

The Clerk: As for admissibility, we haven't heard any other issues on admissibility come up with this motion. It's more the concerns that members have brought up, such as some issues that Mr. Drouin raised. If the committee is going to consider making another modification to personal information, for example, I would appreciate it if you could flesh out how you want that to read in the motion so I would know what to put in the minutes in this case.

Mr. Drouin, did you have any thought as to text on that?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Clerk, like you, I do have some questions about the results of votes if we're moving to go in camera but we're publishing votes.

Again, it goes back to, for instance, selecting witnesses. We might not agree on all witnesses, but procedurally, how would you publish that information?

We don't have a lot of time in committee, and we sometimes have to select certain witnesses we want to see. I just don't know how that would work.

• (0940)

The Clerk: On that point, we've had some discussions in our offices with my colleagues on that. I think we've arrived a fairly common sense consensus.

The committee, first of all, can give any instruction it wants to us, the clerks, as to what we're going to put in the minutes. We have a tradition where, with in camera, we do not reveal anything except decisions that are taken positively by the committee, things that the committee has agreed to. If the committee disagrees with something or defeats a motion, traditionally we haven't put that in.

The committee is well within its rights to issue instruction to me as the clerk as to what it wants as the minutes, and this is part of the aspect of this motion. However, if we are going to produce the results of a vote, it strikes me as common sense that we would include what the subject matter of that decision was.

To put in the minutes that a decision was taken, and *x* members voted this way and other members voted another way, without putting what the substance of that is wouldn't make any sense.

To my mind, this essentially makes the minutes of an in camera meeting exactly the same as those of a public meeting. If that's what the committee wants, that's the will of the committee and that's fine, and we'll do that. However, committee members might want to consider that one of the reasons that in camera minutes have always not reflected that information was to preserve the anonymity and the confidentiality of the discussions taking place therein. This is an issue for members to decide in terms of how they want to proceed on it.

The only ramification we see is that it is essentially rendering in camera minutes the same as those of a public meeting. Again, the committee can do that, but that's at the committee's discretion.

The Chair: We will first go to Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: I realize that I put the motion without really speaking to it. Obviously, this was passed in PROC in the last Parliament. We're asking for a spirit of transparency and open government here. I just think, amenable to any additions, this would be a great step forward for us to provide the greatest amount of openness and transparency to the public.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

My understanding is that this final paragraph was not included in any of the PROC from the last Parliament, so this in fact would be a new procedure to be followed if this committee so agrees.

Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I understand where the member is coming from, the spirit of openness and transparency, but it creates a lot more problems that I don't understand yet. I think someone, or PROC, should look at this further before we make a decision on that particular paragraph, because if we put that in there, then who makes the decision about whether to publish in camera meetings and subjects, and what's the point of going in camera?

We're not going to support this particular paragraph. We're willing to entertain the in camera proceedings, but adding an amendment for confidentiality.

The Chair: Colleagues, I suggest, then, so we don't completely throw this out or adopt it, that we adjourn the debate on this particular motion at this point in time. Number one, that will give our colleagues at PROC an opportunity to examine it and perhaps make comment and some suggestions; and if we adjourn the debate now, we can always come back to this at some future time.

There is agreement to adjourn the debate on this particular motion. Thank you.

Mr. Green, you also have a proposal on quorum.

The Clerk: That was the one they dealt with already.

Mr. Matthew Green: Just as a point there, as I was following along, based on my past experience, I tried to chime in at the appropriate time. That's why I put the item on quorum when we dealt with it originally.

The Chair: That's fine. It was an order. We dealt with it appropriately and we will come back to this. We'll give all our colleagues a chance to perhaps determine whether or not they're in favour of this.

Now, we're on...?

The Clerk: No. We're done, actually.

The Chair: I think we're complete. Was the last one on notice of motions?

Now I'll entertain a motion to adopt the amended routine motions as a package.

All in favour?

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

That's done. Thank you very much.

As you know, we are regularly scheduled for meetings every Tuesday and Thursday. At this point, we don't have any proposals for study. I will inform the committee that we know there will be some items coming before this committee that we are obliged to deal with on an immediate basis.

Let's invite the analysts to the table.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Before we proceed any further, I'll ask our analysts to introduce themselves and give us a brief background of their experience as analysts in Parliament.

Raphaëlle, please.

• (0945)

Ms. Raphaëlle Deraspe (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Raphaëlle Deraspe. I've been with the library for nine years now and on this particular committee for over five years.

We have some documentation on the variety of services that we can offer this committee.

[*Translation*]

We can provide you with assistance from the beginning to the end of your study. We even help you choose study topics. We also draft briefing notes, which you receive 24 hours before the start of the meeting.

Now I'll let my colleague, Mr. van den Berg, introduce himself and tell you a bit more about briefing notes.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan van den Berg (Analyst): My name is Ryan van den Berg. I have been with the library for almost three years now, and this is the first time I've sat on a committee.

I would also like to add to my colleague's points that all the services we offer to the committee are impartial and confidential. You can feel free to come to us with any matters that you might have regarding the subject matter of the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'll just add for Ryan and Raphaëlle that we've had about eight other analysts over these five years, so we'll try to get to know you before you disappear like the others.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues.

As for what I'm going to suggest since we don't have any work agenda yet, I was about to say that we will be having some business coming before this committee that we'll have to deal with immediately, most primarily the estimates, both the supplementaries and the mains. I expect we'll be dealing with those in very short order.

It has been the custom and convention of most committees, including this one, that should any government legislation be adopted in the House and referred to the appropriate committee, that takes precedence. In other words, even if we're in the middle of a study of some topic and a piece of government legislation comes forward, we drop the study and move to the government legislation immediately. Likewise, we deal with the supplementaries and main estimates with some immediacy, as opposed to other studies.

Now, the clerk has pointed out to me that pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year ending March 31 have been deemed referred to several standing committees, OGGO being one of them.

The Clerk: We have, I think, four votes that are referred to OGGO.

The Chair: We have four votes on the supplementaries: Public Works, Shared Services Canada and the Treasury Board Secretariat. We'll be dealing with those immediately.

However, I would suggest that we convene a meeting of the subcommittee on agenda as quickly as possible to try to determine beyond the estimates what studies this committee may wish to engage in.

When would the supplementaries be available? Immediately?

The Clerk: Right now. Supplementary estimates (B) have been referred to the committee already. They're before the committee, and the committee can start its study whenever it wants.

The Chair: All right. What is the deadline for reporting back to the House on the supplementaries?

The Clerk: The supplementary estimates are referred to the committee until three days before the last allotted day in the period, or three days before the last sitting day in the period. The reason is that it's dependent upon when the last allotted day is decided. Unfortunately, we don't know when that will be. That's the prerogative of the government, which has not decided when that last day will be.

When that last day is designated, three days before then, the order of reference for the supplementary estimates will lapse. In the event that it's not determined, the reason we have the other caveat of three days before the last sitting day is in case the government gets to within that being the last sitting day. There has to be a deadline that kicks in.

Suffice it to say that we don't actually know the deadline on that. We know that the period ends on March 26. We know that at least three sitting days before that date, it will lapse. It may lapse earlier

than that. The committee can, however, study the subject matter of it under its general mandate under the Standing Orders.

I would suggest that in the calendar time that we're dealing with now, we don't have a whole lot of time, frankly, to do this before March 26th, as there are some break weeks coming up. The committee may want to take that into consideration when considering its schedule of when it wants to do its business.

• (0950)

The Chair: I do have a suggestion, but I'll entertain discussion first on when this committee and those members from the subcommittee on agenda would like to meet. For example, would you like to take the scheduled committee time next Tuesday to deal with the subcommittee business, or would you like a prior meeting? My suggestion is that we deal with subcommittee items at next Tuesday's meeting and try to determine a bit of a work plan for the remainder of this parliament.

Having said that, in practical terms, as Paul has pointed out, we've got a fairly short timeline to deal with the supplementary estimates—particularly supplementary estimates (B). We'll also have the mains and other supplementary estimates coming forward. With the break weeks and the like, we'll probably have only four or five weeks left after we deal with all of the other estimates and perhaps government legislation. That's not a whole bunch of time. That's why I'd like to suggest that we have a subcommittee meeting first to try to determine what our priority items may be for studies that we can entertain in the limited time we have before we adjourn for the summer.

Mr. McCauley, please.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I mostly agree with that, but because we have limited time and it takes awhile to get the ministers, I'm wondering if maybe we should go ahead and agree on the supplementary estimates meetings right now for the three ministers we have votes for, so the chair can have time to corral them. If we wait until next Tuesday to agree, that would take away today, tomorrow, Monday and Tuesday before we can agree and then start trying to contact Minister Duclos, Minister Murray and the others to appear before us. My understanding is that we have the main estimates barreling down towards us very soon as well.

The Chair: Those are good points. As you know, Mr. McCauley, and again—for the benefit of our new members—when ministers are requested to appear before the committee, it is a request and we try to accommodate their schedules as best as we can. If this committee wishes, particularly for the three ministers responsible for these three votes, we will invite the respective ministers and ask them to provide their timelines for when they might be able to appear before the committee. After we get the ministers' calendars, we can schedule the times.

I think it would be folly to try to establish meetings now if we don't even know when the ministers are available to attend. We can extend the invitation to those three ministers to appear before this committee at their earliest opportunity, given the fact and letting them know that we have some timelines and deadlines in place. We can ask for their calendars and then we can schedule them appropriately.

Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When you consider the number of break weeks we have and what the clerk has outlined on the last day it needs to be reported, I would suggest that rather than leaving it open-ended by asking the ministers when they are available, we instead outline for them that we basically have three days for them to choose from. If we take next Tuesday for a subcommittee meeting, these days would be February 27, March 10 and March 12. I would suggest just being a little more definitive by saying that these are the three days, and hopefully they will be able to choose one of those days.

The Chair: Thank you.

Paul has informed me that we can certainly do that. We don't have to put that in the form of a letter. We can just transmit this directly.

Again, our normal practice when ministers appear has been to give them one hour to provide testimony. If it deals with supplementary or main estimates, the normal procedure is that the minister appears for the first hour and her or his officials stay and continue to discuss the supplementary estimates or the mains for the second hour. Given the fact, however, that we only have three days, potentially, to get all of the three ministers here, in some cases we may have to have two ministers appearing one hour apart at the same meeting. That I think will be determined once we find out the response from the respective ministers.

Mr. Weiler.

● (0955)

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Given that there are a number of new members on this committee, I was wondering if we might also be able to schedule a briefing from the department—kind of a one-on-one—on estimates and some of the other procedures.

The Chair: Just to be clear on this, Patrick, are you asking for a separate briefing on supplementary estimates (B) for new members who want to attend, as opposed to having officials appear before this committee to discuss those estimates at the same time as the minister?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): I'll let Patrick speak to his own request, but I think a more general departmental briefing would be available to members if that is their wish.

The Chair: We've had departmental briefings before. Quite frankly, I'm not sure how those are arranged and organized. I guess that through the clerks and the analysts we can invite the respective officials to come forward to brief committee members on the supplementary estimates (B), but I....

Mrs. Kelly Block: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I don't think it's just a briefing on the supplementary estimates (B), but a briefing on the department and everything that goes along with being a member of this committee and dealing with the operations and estimates.

The Chair: Was that your intent, Patrick?

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks for the clarification.

We have done that before. The last time we did a briefing of that sort was in 2016. We can certainly arrange that again for those members who wish to attend.

Francis.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I can make a recommendation.

Perhaps rather than having the subcommittee meet this Tuesday, and not knowing when ministers will show up in the next four or five meetings, maybe we can request that briefing on the estimates from Treasury Board on Tuesday, for example. We will be dealing with estimates that are coming up. It would be good for members to understand how the estimates process works. I have it on pretty good authority that the Treasury Board could appear before this committee this coming Tuesday. Knowing when the ministers will appear, hopefully by next Tuesday or our next meeting, we can choose a subcommittee date when they are not appearing—for one hour, if that works.

The Chair: We have a couple of Kellys in this group, so I'll have to go by surnames here.

Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We have such a short time for this, I think that if someone wants a briefing, they can approach the department separately for a private briefing. Treasury Board has done that many times outside of the committee.

No offence, but if the government had started committees and recalled Parliament immediately, we would have had time for this. But if we take Tuesday for the subcommittee, we're down to three days for the supplementary estimates.

I'm told we're back to the old system of estimates, which means the main estimates have to be tabled within the next week and deemed reported at the end of March. We have the supplementary estimates (B) and the mains to go through, with potentially just three or four dates to have ministers before us. To take any further time away from the supplementary estimates (B) and the mains, which, frankly, are the reason this committee exists, is folly, in my view. I appreciate what you are saying, but we have such short timelines. We need to set our dates so that we will actually start doing our job and start looking at the estimates.

Again, the main estimates have to be tabled very shortly as well.

The Chair: If I may—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Perhaps we can defer everything else to the subcommittee, but at least confirm now that we will look at, perhaps, the 27th, and March 10 and March 12, for the supplementary estimates (B).

The Chair: If I may, with respect to Patrick's suggestion about a briefing, individual briefings can be arranged. Any members who wish to have a departmental briefing can certainly make arrangements through the clerk and the analyst, and have a fulsome discussion. I would suggest, because of the short timelines in this particular case, maybe that is the best route to go.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Treasury Board has offered that every time they have dropped the mains.

The Chair: I would suggest that, rather than try to organize a full committee briefing, we leave it to the individual members to request one individually. Those services are certainly available. That would free up a little more time.

Unfortunately, because of the way the break weeks fall, we are dealing with a very truncated calendar.

I'm going back to Francis. You had suggested that for next Tuesday's meeting we invite the president of the Treasury Board. Am I correct?

• (1000)

Mr. Francis Drouin: For a departmental briefing by Treasury Board...but I don't know if the president of the Treasury Board is available. Of course, they have to appear within our next four or five meetings. I just don't know who is available on that particular day.

I don't know if we are going to have two hours of committee business next Tuesday, so in the first hour we could discuss committee business, and have that briefing in the second hour. If it's just going to be the subcommittee meeting anyway, we could invite other members who want to join us.

The Chair: The suggestion now—let me try to encapsulate this—is that next Tuesday, the first hour, from 8:45 to 9:45, would be the subcommittee on agenda and procedure, and from 9:45 to 10:45 we would invite TBS departmental officials to come and provide a briefing to this committee. Are we in agreement on that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Just to clarify one more thing, in the second hour we would invite any members who want to receive a briefing, along with the subcommittee. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes, it's been proposed that there be a full committee meeting that second hour.

That being said, it's up to the committee members themselves whether they want to participate in that briefing. It wouldn't be optional; it would be a full meeting, as called by the chair.

Paul made a good point. As members would know, in camera discussions can be called at any time. However, Treasury Board officials would probably appreciate knowing now whether the discussions were going to be in camera or in public. I would ask for some advice from this committee with regard to the briefing itself with Treasury Board officials. Would you prefer that to be in camera or in public?

Mr. Francis Drouin: I say it's really up to new members to decide. In the past we've done it in camera, so we could ask any kind of questions, so we wouldn't look unprofessional perhaps. I'll leave it up to the committee to decide.

The Chair: Well, that's why I mentioned that the Treasury Board officials would like to know now whether it would be in public or in camera. I would like to have a decision on that question before we adjourn.

Do you want to make a suggestion, Francis? We'll see if that is—

Mr. Francis Drouin: From my previous experience, I would say that in camera is better. There are going to be plenty of opportunities to find some embarrassing things, I'm sure. This is not one of them. It's just a briefing.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, if it's purely a briefing on process, then that's a good idea.

The Chair: Mr. Green, I saw your hand up. I'm not sure if you wanted to add to that.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm referring back to my deferred motion—I probably can't speak back to it—but I'm always of the mind that we should keep as many meetings as we can open and in public. If we have questions that we need to ask, we ask them. If there are questions that we don't know that we don't know, then we should probably take those offline and have private briefings—as I'm about to do in about 45 minutes.

The Chair: Just so you know and just so we're clear, what we're asking Treasury Board officials to do is to come in to provide a basically holistic briefing on the Treasury Board itself and on the estimates.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, so that I'm clear, these proceedings are recorded and then open to the public at such time. Is that correct?

The Clerk: Public committee meetings are broadcast live. They're being broadcast right now.

• (1005)

Mr. Matthew Green: Then they're archived. People could go to that. My intention would be to go to my constituency and say, "This is how it works", and allow them to learn along with me. That's my intention. The more open, recorded, public-facing opportunities to do that.... I'd like to do that.

The Chair: Mr. Green is making a suggestion that when the Treasury Board officials come to discuss the main and supplementary estimates that it be done in public. I'm looking for whether or not there is concurrence by members.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I would agree with Mr. Drouin. This briefing is going to be a learning briefing. I agree with him. Estimates are a difficult process to understand. I would hate to have anyone not learn because they're afraid of asking a dumb question.

The Chair: There might be a silly question, for example.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: There will be enough of us asking dumb questions, but I agree with Mr. Drouin. If it's purely a briefing and nothing to do with the supplementary estimates (B) specifically, then let's just keep it as is.

The Chair: We have two opposing views, which are very good points each, respectfully, but I would like to make sure we have a determination now, so we can inform Treasury Board. I'll just ask the simple question. All of those in favour of having the Treasury Board officials provide their testimony next Tuesday in camera?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: No, Chair, we're not saying "testimony". It's a briefing on the testimony process.

The Chair: When I say "testimony", Kelly, when the officials come in and give us information, that's testimony.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thank you.

The Chair: All in favour of in camera?

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

The Chair: Duly noted, Mr. Green, thank you.

Mr. Matthew Green: Let the record show.... I should say this, though. Out of all the things, Mr. Chair, if you will indulge me, I do appreciate that the clerk did not announce the earlier vote count for the vice-chair because that would have been embarrassing.

The Chair: We'll keep that our little secret.

Prior to next Tuesday's meeting, is it the will of this committee then to invite the other three ministers to appear before the committee prior to...and we'll put in a deadline there?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It has to be part of March. The mains have to be out by the 28th. Therefore, they have to be deemed reported by the end of March, which means—

The Chair: I'm going to ask Raphaëlle.

Ms. Raphaëlle Deraspe: This is a bit confusing because, with the last Parliament, the House adopted different standing orders for the main estimates. Now we're going back to the old model, if I can call it that, and the main estimates have to be tabled on or before March 1, and the committee has until May 31 to report them to the House.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Did I mention we've been sharing with the PBO? Their understanding from Treasury Board is that it's the end of March they're deemed reported.

Ms. Raphaëlle Deraspe: Not for the main estimates.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Are you sure?

Ms. Raphaëlle Deraspe: Yes.

The Clerk: That may be a confusion. Possibly they mean the supplementary estimates by March 26, or do you mean the main estimates?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's what they were saying, and I just got a note from Jason Jacques.

The Clerk: [*Inaudible—Editor*] standing order.

Ms. Raphaëlle Deraspe: It's May 31, and actually Parliament will vote on the main estimates at the end of June with the supply bill.

The Chair: That is the normal timeline.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Priority would be on supplementary estimates (B).

The Chair: Absolutely. We'll extend the invitations to the respective ministers, colleagues, and will have a meeting of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure next Tuesday morning at 8:45 for those members of the subcommittee. Then we will have testimony, or a briefing, by Treasury Board officials on supplementary estimates (B) from 9:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m.

Mrs. Kelly Block: No, not on the supplementary estimates (B).

The Chair: I'm sorry, I mean on the estimates, and those will be in camera.

Is there any other information for the benefit of the committee that you would like to discuss?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Seeing none, thank you all, colleagues.

The meeting is adjourned.

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