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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Chair: Ms. Ruby Sahota





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• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.)):** The committee is now in session.

We're going to start with the first item of committee business, which is Ms. Duncan's motion.

Ms. Duncan, would you like to present your motion?

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

If I—

**Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC):** I have a point of order, Madam Chair. What happened with the business we were dealing with at the last meeting? Has someone decided not to deal with that any longer?

I thought that would be the first thing to come up, since it was the thing we were dealing with last.

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** There should have been a list.

**The Chair:** Since debate was adjourned on that, if anyone on the committee wishes to restart debate on that issue, we definitely can do so, but we're going to move on with the next item.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I think we should.

**The Chair:** We can.

Let's move on with this motion now, and then we can definitely bring that back up.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That's a little odd, but okay.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Let me begin by congratulating you on your new position, and to say to my colleagues that I'm really looking forward to working with all of you.

I would like to bring forward the following motion:

That the Procedure and House Affairs committee invite officials from the Department of Public Works and Government Services and the House of Commons for briefings on the Centre Block Rehabilitation Project and the Block 2 redevelopment as part of the Long Term Vision and Plan (LTVP) for the Parliamentary Precinct.

I don't think this is controversial. There hasn't been an update on this since the spring. We're dealing with iconic buildings, buildings of historical and archaeological significance. It is an enormous project, at least 10 years and billions of dollars. It is the first full renovation since 1927. Budgets and timelines have yet to be fully determined.

We want to make sure that this building is seismically sound, that it is brought up to modern codes—the removal of asbestos, the updating of electrical and plumbing systems. We want to ensure that the requirements meet the needs of the House of Commons, the Senate and the Library of Parliament. We want to really make sure that it's set up for everyone who works within the House, the Senate, and the Library, and to know whether approvals are required by Parliament. We want to ensure that it's fully accessible. I have heard that the senators are receiving regular briefings.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Duncan.

Would anyone like to speak to this motion?

We'll have Mr. Richards, and then Ms. Blaney.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I think it's a fine idea, certainly for all the reasons that Ms. Duncan has very eloquently laid out. It would be wise to hear from the officials about the Centre Block rehabilitation.

However, I will move an amendment because I believe that ultimately there's ministerial accountability for everything. I would move the following amendment to add, “and that the Minister of Public Services and Procurement be invited to appear for two hours at a subsequent meeting”, so that we can hear from the minister and ask any questions that there might be on that as well.

I fully support the motion but would suggest that amendment.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Regarding debate on the amendment, go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** First of all, I appreciate the amendment to the motion and I think that's an important part of the discussion. There's some clarity that I will be seeking around the initial motion as well.

I guess at this point we're debating the amendment. It would be interesting to hear about the rationale for bringing the minister in for the two hours. Do ministers usually come for two hours? I thought sometimes it's their.... I would like some clarity from the member on whether he's expecting the minister to come for two hours, or for the first hour, as I've seen at other committees, and then have staff and bureaucrats come for the second session.

I'm wondering if I could get some clarification on the amendment, please.

• (1105)

**Mr. Blake Richards:** The amendment is inviting the minister for two hours at a subsequent meeting.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Obviously the rationale here is that this is a pretty significant project. We as members would have an opportunity to then ask questions to the person responsible, and members may have suggestions. It will take some time, I would think. Yes, ministers in some cases have chosen to come for only one hour rather than two. Usually they're invited for two. In this case, I would hope the minister would provide two. I think it's not just asking some questions. Members may also have suggestions as well. She is ultimately the person responsible.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you for that clarity.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** I was going to suggest on that topic that in the four years I sat on two other committees I've only ever seen a minister come for one hour, but if the language is "invite for two hours", I assume the minister can say she's only available for an hour.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That would be unfortunate, but she could.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you for the commentary on that.

We can definitely ask, but I would suggest that it's probably better to indicate it would be one hour.

The other thing is that our subcommittee will determine the individual witnesses. Isn't that how it normally happens?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That's not what's been suggested by the motion, so we're just adding to that. The motion itself is—

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** The motion suggests, if we're going to have a back-and-forth on it—

**The Chair:** I wanted to discuss with the committee, after we got through this motion, the scheduling of other meetings, witnesses and how we're going to deal with some of that work here at PROC. I think different committees have done it differently.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I want to be absolutely clear. Let's call a spade a spade. In my experience over the last four years, Conservatives typically, or opposition members, rightfully so—I'm sure that it would be the same if it were the other way around—like to get ministers at the end of the table so they can start asking them any kind of question they want. I think it really comes down to respect for the intent of the motion and the intent of the study, which is to study Centre Block.

If we want to invite a minister here because we want to ask them questions that genuinely relate to Centre Block, I think that's fair game and that's something we should be doing. If we want to invite a minister here to ask about another part of their department that has absolutely nothing to do with Centre Block, I just want to get it out on the table right now. Is that the intent?

You want to stick to that. Then I think that's fair game. I think we need to establish from the outset exactly what that will be.

**The Chair:** I'll talk to the clerk about it as well, but generally when a minister is invited, from my experience on this committee,

the questioning would have to be relevant to the subject they're brought in on. It's usually with the estimates, where there's an array of different subjects, that you might be able to have that larger scope for questions, but generally, if they're brought in on a certain motion they would have to stay within the relevance of that motion. You could correct me if I'm wrong.

Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** I was going to affirm your position, Madam Chair, that generally when ministers come...and I think Mr. Richards has been very clear on what his motion would say. When you look at the minister, she's the landlord of the parliamentary precinct and all the work that goes on, so I think it is incumbent upon us to ask her about what is, effectively, a multi-billion dollar project that affects multiple buildings around the parliamentary precinct. I think it's well within her prerogative.

If any of the line of questioning does get out of hand or out of order, then you have the prerogative, as chair, with the guidance of the clerk, to rule them out of order. I don't think there's anything inappropriate. I think it's well within reason to have the minister come and talk about this project, as the landlord of the property.

• (1110)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Before we vote, can you reread that?

**The Chair:** We have one more speaker.

Monsieur Therrien.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Thank you.

Good morning everyone. I find that it makes sense and that it's clearly useful. However, I would like some information. It says here "invite officials," but do you know who they are? Will we make a list? How many of them will come and how long will they be here? I know that we're talking about the amendment, but I wanted this information first. Regarding the amendment from our Conservative colleagues, they said that they wanted the minister to appear for two hours, but that if he came for only one hour, that may still be sufficient.

Can the amendment state that we're open to the possibility that it's only an hour? Do we set a firm time frame of two hours and, to avoid keeping the minister here unnecessarily, let him leave after one hour if we feel that we've covered all the issues? If we put two hours, do we need to keep him here for two hours? Do we determine whether he needs to be here or, on the contrary, he no longer needs to be here because we've covered all the issues?

Lastly, at the risk of wearing you out, I want to make one final point. The amendment has been tabled, but I don't have it in paper form. You told me that this was normal. Should I consider it normal to not receive a paper version, in both official languages, of the amendments tabled? Should I mourn them? The people in the government are telling me that this is normal. I just want your opinion on that. If you tell me that it's normal and that I must get used to it, I'll never bother you about it again. We can get used to anything. I've been married twice, which means that I can get used to anything.

I just want to hear the chair's response to this matter.

[English]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Therrien, I agree that we should definitely get into deciding the list of officials and witnesses who would be on this study, but first I think it would be appropriate if we dealt with the amendment at hand. The wording we could use for the amendment is that we would be inviting the minister to the meeting, which is generally a two-hour meeting anyway. All of our meetings are two hours.

Would you like, specifically, for it to state “two hours”? Is having “to the meeting” not okay?

**An hon. member:** How about “up to two hours”?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** No, I'm indicating that we invite her for a two-hour meeting.

Of course, if we run out of questions and we don't have questions, then she won't have to stay for two hours, because the meeting will be over. I don't know why we need to specify that. It would be fairly self-evident that if there were no more questions, the meeting would then end.

**The Chair:** Okay, so your amendment specifically states a “two-hour meeting”.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Yes, I think it should be two hours. This is a pretty significant project. It's a project that the minister is responsible for.

**The Chair:** I agree. It's just that meetings are two hours, so I thought what you want....

**Mr. Blake Richards:** There would be a lot of questions, a lot of answers. I'm indicating that we would have the officials here for a meeting. We would then have the minister here for another meeting.

**The Chair:** Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** As a point of clarification, the amendment was to invite the minister and staff to a subsequent meeting. Is that right? That's “minister and her staff”.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I didn't indicate anyone else. If she wants to bring her staff, she's welcome to.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Okay.

Anyway, it's the minister for a subsequent meeting. Is that right?

**An hon. member:** This is the benefit of having it—

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Written down, yes.

**The Chair:** Let's hold on. I don't think I've even been able to completely answer Mr. Therrien's question.

Once we pass or reject the amendment, then we'll move to the main motion.

If it is the desire of the committee to have this study, then at that time the committee as a whole—since we haven't really decided how we're going to proceed with steering committees—will then decide the witness list, and hopefully at this meeting today.

The clerk is going to read the motion, and then we'll continue with the list.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive):** The amendment reads—and it's to come after the text that's already on your paper—that the Minister of Public Services be invited to appear at a subsequent meeting. That's the current wording of the amendment that's on the floor.

**The Chair:** Okay, it's “at a subsequent meeting”.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** What I had indicated earlier was that the Minister of Public Services and Procurement be invited to appear “for two hours” at a subsequent meeting.

● (1115)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** See? This is the benefit of writing it down.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Do you want me to read it a little slower? Will that help you?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** No, I don't. I also don't need the condescending tone, with all due respect, Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** It's been read three times.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** What I will say—

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen, you have the floor anyway. You're next up.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Perhaps I may start by raising a point of order. I respect the fact that Mr. Therrien raised it in a justful way, but the reality of the situation is that this motion was properly moved by a member of the committee. The Conservatives had a lot of time to look at this. They knew, obviously, because they ran out of the gate with their amendment to it. Why didn't they put it in writing in both official languages so that it could be distributed around the table?

It's not as though this is one of those ones like last time where we were looking to change a word or something here or there and you could do it on the floor. You knew you were going to do this. Why not put it in writing? I saw that you then provided it to Mr. Therrien a few seconds ago.

He did the exact same thing that he did last time, Madam Chair, which is to distribute one thing to one member and not to all the members around the table. As a point of order I think we need to wrap our heads around getting that done properly.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Perhaps I can respond to that point of order.

**The Chair:** Sure, Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** This is completely within order. When a motion is moved it is entirely within order, I know that, to move an amendment verbally. That is not an irregular thing. It's quite commonly done. In terms of the idea of why I didn't write this down ahead of time, I expected we were going to be dealing with the motion that we were dealing with in the last meeting. I was clear about that when you brought this forward at the beginning of the meeting, Chair.

**The Chair:** Because I had stated that we were going to start with this....

**Mr. Blake Richards:** If anyone is having difficulty understanding the amendment, I do apologize, but it's not complicated. It's not complex. I'm simply indicating here that we invite the minister to come for a two-hour meeting. I don't know what is so confusing to people here, but I do apologize. It is completely within order to bring forward an amendment verbally.

Why did I give it to one member? Well, we were all speaking in English and his first language is French—

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** So the fact that we're speaking in English somehow dictates how we should be distributing—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** He asked for.... Would you like me to finish?

**The Chair:** I'm going to rule on the point of order at this point.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** If you would like me to write it down for you in English I could do that as well, but I believe you understood it.

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards, I think I've had the opportunity to hear both points of view. Although I appreciate obviously what Mr. Gerretsen is saying, it is always helpful when it's in writing, but it's completely within order to do so from the floor verbally. That is why, as stated previously, we have translation provided to us in order to help with that. We can of course read the amendment out once again if further clarification is needed.

We do have a general speaking list and we will carry on with that.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** As a point of order, I'm not finished so I just want to make sure that I'm on the list.

**The Chair:** You're on the general list. That was just considered a point of order.

Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I'm glad we're discussing the motion and the amendment to the motion that was set out in our agenda, which was sent out to us in advance so that we all knew exactly what we were dealing with when we got here. I'm really glad to see that we're doing that.

To Mr. Therrien's point, what I got from his interjection a few moments ago was that we might be setting up the amendment in such a way that says we're inviting you for two hours and if you don't come for two hours then we're not interested. Is there a way to change the wording a bit so that the minister, through the invitation, can also interpret this to mean that if you can come for a shorter amount of time we will take you for a shorter amount of time too?

All I was going to suggest was that we amend the motion to say "up to two hours". We invite the minister to come for up to two hours, so if the minister says I can only come for one hour then we still get that one hour and we're not shutting the door just because she's not available for two hours.

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards, would you be willing to entertain that suggestion, or would you like Mr. Gerretsen, if he wishes, to move a separate amendment?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** If the mover does not accept that as friendly amendment, I'd be happy to move it.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I don't believe it's necessary.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I'll move that we insert the word "up to" in front of "two hours".

**The Chair:** This is the subamendment.

Is there debate on the subamendment to the amendment?

Monsieur Therrien.

• (1120)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Words are important. The verb "to invite" is used here. If a minister is invited, can he say that he won't come? Is he invited or summoned? Do you understand the difference? Is the goal to invite the minister, who can then say that he doesn't want to come, or to summon him, which leaves him no choice but to come?

[English]

**The Chair:** It's an invitation.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** So he can refuse.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Okay. That's all I wanted to know.

[English]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** I appreciate where Mr. Gerretsen is going with this. The challenge.... Again, as my colleague from the Bloc said, words are important. Up to two hours could mean 10 minutes, 15 minutes or whatever the minister's schedule determines on that day. I would like—and I hope that our friends across the way wouldn't have a problem with this—to have the minister here for up to two hours, with a minimum of an hour at least, for questioning.

Would I be moving a subamendment to Mr. Gerretsen's?

**The Chair:** I believe you could do the same and ask for a friendly amendment.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I would entertain that.

Instead of "up to", it will be "between an hour and two hours".

**Mr. John Brassard:** Do you understand the point, Mark?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Absolutely.

**Mr. John Brassard:** It's because with 10 minutes in her schedule, she flies in and leaves. I think as a courtesy to the committee, it should be a minimum of an hour.

**The Chair:** It would say, "between one and two hours". Would that be satisfactory?

**Mr. John Brassard:** Sure.

**The Chair:** We're still on the subamendment.

Go ahead, Madam Petitpas Taylor.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** I just want to make a comment.

Mr. Therrien asked a question when there was a great deal of discussion. His question was specific and I want to make sure that he receives an answer.

He asked whether, when an amendment is presented to the committee, it must be received in writing. I want to make sure that he understood the answer, and that the answer comes from the clerk.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The answer is yes. It is appropriate to move an amendment from the floor. Once again, I know that's not ideal, but it is procedurally acceptable.

Is there any more debate on the subamendment?

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Can you read it one more time?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**The Clerk:** The subamendment is to add, after the word "for" and before the word "to", the words "between one and two hours". If adopted the new amendment would read, that the Minister of Public Services be invited to appear for between one and two hours at a subsequent meeting.

(Subamendment agreed to)

**The Chair:** Now we're back to the amendment as amended. The clerk just read out the amended version. We would be inviting the minister for between one and two hours at a subsequent meeting.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Just as a point of clarification, any time the minister comes to committee, typically it's for a two-hour period. How does that happen, again?

**The Chair:** There is no strict rule about that. Generally ministers are invited for a meeting, and a meeting is typically two hours. Oftentimes what you may have seen and what I have seen in the past is that a minister may present for one hour and then their departmental officials will present for the second hour, or other witnesses would be brought in just for efficiency's sake, but there's no strict rule on that.

(Amendment as amended agreed to)

**The Chair:** Now we're on the main motion.

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

• (1125)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I think this motion is entirely appropriate. This committee should undertake this work.

As indicated by Ms. Duncan, currently there isn't a timeline for the completion of Centre Block. This number of 10 years is just something that has been put out there. There actually isn't a timeline. As she also mentioned, there isn't even a budget, so at least at this point, there really is little of what would appear to be fiscal oversight of this project.

Also, as Ms. Duncan indicated, the Senate has been having regular meetings, briefings and updates with respect to Centre Block. Therefore, in the interest of all parliamentarians, it is incumbent upon this committee to get itself involved, at least to the same degree that the Senate is.

I suggest that it would also be appropriate for members of this committee to go on a tour of the work, if that can be arranged through the House administration, to get a view of exactly what's going on in there.

Madam Chair, I'm sure that is something you could arrange. I will leave that with you, but it would be good for this committee to do that.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I just want to add to the comments my colleagues have made and Ms. Duncan's motion here, which I think is very appropriate.

In reviewing the materials early on, I saw in the 42nd Parliament that the PROC committee, in its 99th report, indicated that this committee should pick up where the last PROC committee left off. It recommended that this committee begin to have some oversight and hopefully some input into the Centre Block revitalization project.

We're building this for 100 years into the future, at least, and MPs should have input. We've heard that senators are getting briefings and having input. It's important that, as MPs, we all have a voice in this important work.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the member for the motion. This is a really important issue and one that is of concern to many Canadians, so it's good that we'll be looking at this and bringing more transparency to the process.

One of the things that would help me understand is that this motion actually doesn't tell us how long the study will be. Based on the briefings the Senate is receiving, is there is any way to understand how long this process would take?

Just so I understand, if there isn't a timeline listed in the motion, how was that established by the committee? Could I have some information about that?

**The Chair:** The points raised are all good ones. The trip is definitely something that I'll talk to our team up here about and something that we could probably even question our witnesses about arranging. We can figure that out.

In terms of the witnesses, maybe that's something we could decide on right now, in terms of which officials are going to come. After we meet with them, there might be other witnesses we'll be interested in calling. We might only learn that information after the first meeting.

That goes as well for the length of the study. After we have the first meeting or two, we might be able to ascertain better whether it's an in-depth study that the committee would like to do or something on which we would like to get regular updates once a month or whenever. It's up to the committee, really, but I think we would benefit from the first meeting and it would help us better decide.

Ms. Duncan.

**Hon. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you, Ms. Blaney, for bringing that forward.

We absolutely agree. We thought we'd bring it to the committee. Perhaps this is something that the steering committee could look at as well.

This is such an important project there needs to be regular check-ins. I was hoping this could be brought to the steering committee and perhaps there could be some decisions made.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Hopefully something that comes out of this is that we establish a process to keep us involved. Whether that means setting up or recommending to the House to create a special committee for this, such as the Senate has done, or whether that work stays within this committee, this is something that needs to be ongoing, that transcends different Parliaments so that it doesn't have to be re-established every time.

The membership will have to be re-established but not the actual committee and the work, because quite frankly, that's the benefit the Senate has. They can have the same people, who are established, who can walk through this process, the whole way through it.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen, I think those are great points you brought up about a special committee or this committee continuing on an ongoing process.

In terms of the witnesses who would be coming, the clerk would approach the Department of Public Works to find out who would be the best people to bring forward on this subject, but if any of the members here today have specific people they know of who would be the best people to bring forward, you can definitely submit those names.

I believe you wanted to say something else, Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, again, for your patience as I learn and understand this.

It sounds like we have some decisions to make as we go along the process, and I am clear about that. What I am wondering about is how we will report back.

If we continue, let's just say we say that PROC is going to keep this and get regular updates. Will each update be a different report and will we be tabling them in the House? I'm just curious about the process. Maybe this is not the place to discuss it, but I just have some questions about how that would work.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, I think, Ms. Blaney, you're looking for a lot more structure than I am able to—

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Maybe this is about determining that structure.

**The Chair:** Absolutely, this committee can do so. I was just about to say that, as we start the process, the committee may wish to report recommendations back to the House at any given time when we feel we have something to make a recommendation on. However, there may be times when we're just gathering evidence and don't feel there is a recommendation to be made.

Our wonderful analysts take great notes, and they'll be compiling that information. We could also wait until later on to make some of those recommendations. The committee is the master of its proceedings, as we all know, so it's up to us to decide how we want to do that.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Just quickly, Madam Chair, I've been listening to the discussion and hearing the fact that the Senate has been getting information and updates on the House. Just as a matter of efficiency, is there any mechanism whereby officials can come in and jointly provide updates to both the Senate committee and this committee so that...? Maybe it could be a subcommittee, for example.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** There should be something.

**Mr. John Brassard:** I don't know whether there is a mechanism, but it seems awfully inefficient that they're being updated and we're asking to be updated. Why can't we come together and be updated together?

**The Chair:** That's an excellent point.

Some excellent points have been brought forward. I think we're making progress on this issue. The questions are excellent. I do believe they'll be very appropriate for our witnesses whenever we choose to have this next meeting. We can get a lot of that information. Perhaps we can have a joint committee. The clerk here does not know, and I don't really know how that procedure has taken place. That's something we can find out.

According to the briefing that we have, there is other future potential business and there are some timelines we have to stick to, so we might benefit from having another committee, subcommittee or special committee—whatever you want to call it—take a look at the issue, depending on how deep it gets.



Is everyone at this point ready to vote on the motion?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

**The Chair:** Would you like this meeting to be set up on the first Tuesday back after the constituency week?

• (1135)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** If it can.... We don't have any other business other than one outstanding motion.

**The Chair:** All right. For now, we will slot it in for Tuesday.

Since we have touched upon having a steering committee, would it be...?

The clerk and I had a meeting, and we talked about this. Different committees deal with this differently. Some committees like decisions to be made in the entire committee. They feel that the steering committee decides something, and then that issue has to come back to the full committee for approval, and sometimes you're duplicating the whole process. However, other committees function very well with the steering committee able to decide most of the agenda, and it doesn't take a lot of discussion in the full committee.

Would the will of the committee be to have a steering committee meet regularly or to decide from time to time? How would you like to do that?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** My thoughts on that are that we play it by ear.

I have no trouble with a steering committee doing some initial work. There may be times when we feel that it's more appropriate for the whole committee to do that.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** However, I think it's a "play it by ear" thing.

**The Chair:** Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I think the steering committee is there for a purpose. I think it's a good way to start, to see how it goes. Then when we bring that information back to the committee, we'll become quickly aware of whether it's going to be a consistent practice of having everyone participate or whether it will be case by case. It's good to try the steering committee role first, bring it back and see how the committee feels about it.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I'm just going to say that, based on previous experience, at the very least we should set up that steering committee so that it has its membership in the event that it needs to be used.

I agree with Ms. Blaney that we should at least start with it and see how it goes.

**The Chair:** We have a steering committee almost set up. We have the names of the members. We can slot in a time for that committee to meet.

Would you like for the steering committee to meet? How about meeting before or after next Tuesday's meeting for however long? I mean, it could take just half an hour or....

It wouldn't work for your schedule? Okay.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** If we're going to do a Tuesday meeting, then maybe we would have to do the steering committee when we have Thursday's meeting. I don't know.

**The Chair:** Would you like it within the committee time?

• (1140)

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I think that would probably be ideal. It makes it easier for everybody. They already have that time planned in their schedule. We all know how our schedules can be around here. Sometimes we may have to decide to do it outside of those times, but I don't think we're at that spot right now. We're not seeing a huge agenda here.

**The Chair:** Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I just want to clarify. Bear with me here; I'm relatively new.

I just want to understand the role and the function of a steering committee. I know the role of a steering committee quite well in other contexts. Is it primarily to form agendas and prepare those for this group? If so, these are very short meetings. From time to time, could they happen by conference call if members are busy? This is just a thought.

**The Chair:** To the first part, yes, the steering committee would be setting the agenda, maybe deciding on witnesses at times. However, we would not be able to do it via conference call. It would have to be in a formal setting, with the translation and everything provided.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Of course, at the meeting after, where the full committee would meet, the steering committee would be bringing their recommendations to the full committee.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** For approval by the committee...?

**The Chair:** Yes.

Tentatively, since at this time the agenda is not that full, we can set it up for the next Thursday meeting. If we find that we want to call some other witnesses on Thursday, we could have the steering committee sit for one hour and the witnesses brought in during the second hour, or however we wish to do it.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Do we need that much time for the steering committee?

**The Chair:** The clerk says that the amount of time the steering committee needs can be unpredictable. He's even hesitant to slot them in for only an hour.

It's up to the committee. At this time, I personally don't foresee that the committee would take that long, but it's hard to say.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Could it be the hour after?

**The Chair:** Do you mean the hour after committee, or are you saying during the second hour of committee?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Were you going to make it the first hour of committee?

**The Chair:** I'm open to anything. I'm just throwing stuff out there.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** If it only takes 10 minutes, and you've done it before, then you've potentially....

**The Chair:** Right.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** There's this big window.

**The Chair:** There's a gap. That's a good point.

We could slot it in for the second hour of Thursday's meeting.

Is that okay? All right.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Madam Chair—

**The Chair:** The full committee would be here for only the first hour. After that, we would adjourn the formal committee. Only the members of the steering committee would remain for the second hour of Thursday.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Are the steering committee meetings all in camera?

**The Chair:** Correct.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Are we on other business now?

**The Chair:** Yes, we're on other business...actually, hold on. Just before we get there, I want to clear up one more thing. It's just an announcement, really.

From time to time in the previous Parliament, Mr. Bagnell used to host delegates or MPs from other countries, other PROC committees or equivalents, that would like to meet with our committee and share ideas. Currently, there has been a request from British MP Harriet Harman to meet with the committee on February 20. They're here for a conference or some business. Generally, in the past Parliament—but that doesn't matter, because we can decide here what we'd like to do—we held those meetings at a time other than the committee time. It was an informal meeting. It was not mandatory.

Would anyone on the committee, any of the members, be interested in meeting with the British MP on the 20th of February? That's a Thursday.

• (1145)

**Mr. Blake Richards:** First of all, is there any indication as to how long a time this MP is seeking?

**Mr. John Brassard:** It's up to two hours.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** “Up to two hours”...? Let's not even get into that debate again.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I guess what I'm thinking is that we don't have a huge agenda at this point. The only thing that would be still ahead of us would be the minister. Obviously, one would hope that she will choose to come for the two hours. I think we've had it sort of telegraphed by the government that this won't be the case. We're hoping that it's not, in fact, what happens, and that there will be two hours, because I think we do need it. I want to make it quite clear that it would be disappointing if the minister chose not to come for two hours.

Having said that, I think we should leave a two-hour slot available for the minister. That may not be what the minister chooses to

do, but we shouldn't make it not possible for her to come for two hours. We as a committee should be making two hours available. We should do that at a meeting where we have two hours available, which wouldn't be the case on Thursday, obviously. Maybe what we do, in case we don't have.... Until the steering committee meets, we wouldn't really have any other business items. Maybe we offer....

**The Chair:** I'm listening to what you're saying.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** It's normal practice. We've often done these things outside of committee meetings. That's only because we generally don't have the time for it. We maybe do have time on Thursday. We could then have it during the regular committee time and have the steering committee thereafter. That leaves a two-hour spot available for the minister. If the minister chooses not to do that, I guess that's her choice, but we shouldn't, as a committee, be doing something that would not give that opportunity to the minister.

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards is suggesting a more formal meeting during our regular committee time, during I guess the first—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** It doesn't have to be a formal meeting necessarily.

**The Chair:** Okay, but it would be during our regular committee time.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** It's whatever the committee decides, but we could do it during our time, yes.

**The Chair:** It wouldn't be a formal meeting. It would be a very informal meet.

Yes, Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I'm trying to understand this. Of course, as a new member of the procedure and House affairs committee, I'm not aware of how things have been done historically, so I appreciate your bringing this to our attention.

I'm wondering if I could get clarity around the usual practice. If we invite someone to participate in a meeting, will it set a standard that other people from other countries who come feel concerned that they weren't invited to a formal meeting of the committee?

I would just like—

**The Chair:** During the committee time, it won't be a formal meeting. It will be an informal meeting. It could be around a committee table in a committee room, but it wouldn't have the formal setting.

The clerk will go ahead and organize that and send out the invitations. If you can come, that would be greatly appreciated.

That's all for the announcements.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I want to again bring forward the item of business we were dealing with at the last meeting.

As I recall, where we finished up was that Mr. Therrien had indicated he believed he would be in a conflict of interest by participating in that debate and voting on that motion. Ms. Blaney then indicated she wasn't certain, but it seemed she was concerned that she may be in a conflict of interest.

I believe we made a decision to adjourn the debate at that time to allow some time for her and others to determine whether in fact that conflict of interest exists.

I just thought I'd bring this forward to see if there has been any update that can be provided on where we stand with that, and where members stand in terms of their potential conflicts of interest.

**The Chair:** The formal procedure to do this would be for you to move the motion to bring consideration of your amendment back on the table.

• (1150)

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'll move that the consideration of this be continued.

**The Chair:** We have to formally find out if the committee is in favour of continuing debate on this amendment.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Not at this time.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'll ask for a recorded vote.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Could we suspend?

**The Chair:** How long would you like?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Five minutes....

**The Chair:** We will suspend for five minutes.

• (1150)

(Pause)

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Is everyone in the room?

Yes. Okay.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I have a point of order.

I just want clarification. When you asked, "Is there consent?", I was interpreting that to mean unanimous consent, but I understand that it's an actual vote.

**The Chair:** In the absence of there being consensus, a majority vote could bring it back on the floor. If the committee agreed to just bring it back, then we would just be bringing it back, but it seemed like heads were nodding in different directions. Therefore, we need a formal vote to be taken.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** So it's been moved that we...?

**The Chair:** It's been moved that we bring it back.

Is everyone back from recess and prepared to vote on it?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'd like a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** It has been agreed, by consensus actually, so we're back on Ms. Blaney's motion.

We have Mr. Brassard first on the list, and second is Ms. Blaney.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I have point of order, Madam Chair.

This is just for clarification. As I recall, when we were last on this issue, we were actually debating an amendment that I had proposed. Would that be where we would resume, on the amendment?

**The Clerk:** Yes.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Okay, I just wanted to make sure.

**The Chair:** Yes, it is on Mr. Richards' amendment of Ms. Blaney's motion.

Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I think someone asked for it to be read, if you don't mind.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Richards' amendment reads as follows:

That the motion be amended by adding the following:

That a Vice-Chair eligible for more than one additional salary under sections 62.1 to 62.3 of the Parliament of Canada Act shall only receive one of the additional salaries for which he or she is eligible.

[Translation]

**The Clerk:** I can also read it in French.

Que la motion soit modifiée en ajoutant ce qui suit :

Qu'un vice-président admissible à plus d'un poste supplémentaire en vertu des sections 62.1 à 62.3 de la Loi sur le Parlement du Canada ne reçoive qu'un seul des salaires supplémentaires auxquels il est admissible.

• (1200)

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Therrien.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** I want to hear the wording of the motion again.

It's the motion?

**The Clerk:** It's the amendment.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** It's the amendment.

I want to know whether I should formally withdraw from the discussion. I'll explain the specific case that involves me.

I'm a House leader and a vice-chair here.

According to the wording, as a vice-chair, I won't be paid because I already have a paid position elsewhere?

My question is simple. It involves me personally, and I want to know whether I should withdraw from the discussion.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Therrien, in terms of the conflict, I don't know if I can answer that for you. However, in terms of the statute, currently in your situation, and I believe even after this motion is passed—if I understand the motion correctly—you would still be provided the leader's salary and the second vice-chair salary because according to the statute that is what you receive currently and that is what you would continue to receive.

You can correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Richards, but this applies only to the third vice-chair, or the deputy vice-chair.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Okay.

[English]

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I understand the amendment would just indicate that anyone would only be eligible for one additional salary as a vice-chair.

**The Chair:** It would apply to Mr. Therrien.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** As indicated here, we were told that a distinction can't be made because the other amendment wasn't accepted and there was no way of making a distinction between the positions. In my mind it would apply to any vice-chair.

**The Chair:** We'll have Mr. Turnbull and then Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Mr. Richards, may I ask for clarification on your amendment? Last time you brought forth an amendment that had the word "salary" in it. Is this a new wording that only applies to the vice-chair?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** It's the same wording. We're resuming on exactly the same amendment.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** It sounded different when I heard it read out. It sounded as if it only applied to people who had multiple vice-chair positions.

**The Chair:** It's not clear.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Does this apply only to people who have two vice-chair positions, or does it apply to people who have multiple positions, one being a vice-chair and one potentially being a deputy whip or House leader? What's your intent?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** It would apply to anyone who is receiving an additional salary.

**The Chair:** It's for more than one salary, a salary top-up.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** If you are the deputy whip and you're a vice-chair you're supposed to give up your vice-chair salary? Under your amendment I'm asking if that would apply, just to be clear.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** The issue being created by the motion that's being moved here is outside typical practice and that's one of the reasons it's problematic that this is being done. Typically it's not been the case that there's been someone who is eligible for more than one additional salary.

The reason it becomes an issue is that some of the caucuses are quite small and it would require someone to be doing two different roles. Typically that's not done. The intent here is to ensure there isn't double-dipping.

• (1205)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you for that clarification. I'm fully in support of not double-dipping. I'm not asking these questions to show support for double-dipping. I'm trying to clarify the intent of the motion, to see whether it's just in cases where your caucus might be small as an opposition party in this Parliament and you're having to take on multiple vice-chair roles on multiple committees.

Are you saying that anything in addition to one vice-chair role would not be compensated? In other words, if you were taking on two vice-chair roles, you would not get paid doubly for that, which I think makes sense.

**The Chair:** I think Mr. Richards has clarified that it's any dual role. It doesn't have to be just a vice-chair role.

We have Mr. Gerretsen and then Ms. Blaney.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I'm glad we're having this discussion because I too am learning something new. My understanding of this, the way it has been put forward, is that for any three of the vice-chairs—assuming a third one was created—if Mr. Richards also happened to be the deputy whip of his party, he would have to forgo one of the salaries. It doesn't need to indicate which one, which I think might be problematic. Does he get to pick or how is which one he forgoes chosen?

I thought that the intent of this originally was that if you are the vice-chair of this committee and you're the vice-chair of another committee, then you shouldn't be double-dipping. You can only take the salary from one of them. It doesn't apply to any other duties or responsibilities that have been assigned to you.

Along with what Mr. Turnbull is saying, I would agree that I see the potential problem in playing two vice-chair roles in taking the salary twice, but I don't see the problem if Mr. Richards was also the deputy whip of his party. The demands that would bring would be completely separate from the demands a committee would bring.

**The Chair:** Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think this conversation is actually very interesting, thoughtful and worthy. I just want to be really clear here that what I heard earlier from Mr. Richards—and I'm paraphrasing here—is that this is not the normal practice in the House. This is typically not done. I would just say that we actually don't know that. I think that's an important part of this conversation: What has been the normal practice for smaller parties? We could have a whole discussion on how that works, and it would definitely be interesting to look into.

I did meet with the clerks earlier today and had a really important conversation. What I heard very clearly is that by putting together this amendment with the original motion—and I would love to hear from the chair and the clerk on this—it would nullify the main motion, which is a concern because we're trying to get something done.

Could I just get clarity on that and hopefully be able to come back after getting that clarity to discuss?

**The Chair:** The answer to that, Ms. Blaney, as best we know it right now and here, is that it definitely doesn't nullify your original motion. Once again, although this is all procedurally in order here, there may be some problems down the road when it comes to putting this into practice administratively. This amendment may make the whole motion in contradiction to the Parliament of Canada Act.

• (1210)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** What I understood was, if the motion as originally tabled by me went to the House, it would be able to move forward. I think this is important. I believe it's two separate things. For me, what I would propose or move is that we suspend debate for today and perhaps look for clarity. I'm not sure what the process is because I believe there are two separate things. I just want to make sure, as we're having this discussion, that we're actually getting the end result we're hoping for. That would be my proposition.

**The Chair:** Hold on just a moment. We have a list of some people who want to provide input on this issue, and we still have time in this meeting. We have a list with Mr. Therrien, Mr. Gerretsen, Mr. Brassard and Mr. Richards.

Is it your intent at this moment to adjourn debate? It would be adjourning debate, not suspending debate. Or do you want further discussion today? You're free to move that.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I am moving to adjourn debate because I feel that these are two separate things, and I'm not sure how other people are feeling, but we're not getting the information I feel I need to make a decision moving forward.

**The Chair:** Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** The point of order that I'm making—and I would seek your clarification, Madam Chair—is that during this discussion it went to Ms. Blaney as a point of clarification. She had asked a question, but there was still a list of speakers.

Therefore, I would suggest that the motion to adjourn would not be in order and that we continue this until it gets to Ms. Blaney, at which point, when she isn't seeking a clarification, she could move her motion to adjourn.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** On that point of order, I'll just offer some insight. What I recall is that I finished speaking, because I was the one to speak before that. I didn't ask a question, and then you just went to Ms. Blaney. She was next in line.

**The Chair:** She was next in line.

**Mr. John Brassard:** That's what I seek the clarification on.

**The Chair:** Okay, let me just clarify and then we'll move on to your point of order.

I do have a speakers list that is ongoing. Mr. Gerretsen is correct. After him, it was Ms. Blaney's turn, and that's why Mr. Therrien was looking at me as well.

When you properly have the floor, which Ms. Blaney did, it is her prerogative to adjourn debate on the matter. It is why I gave a little pause at that point to inform her that there are others who wish to speak to the matter, so she could know that before making her decision to adjourn debate or not. After informing Ms. Blaney, she still moved to adjourn debate.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** On a point of order, when I obviously brought this back for consideration, at that time I did ask if the members had in fact done any due diligence to determine whether they were, in fact, in a conflict of interest.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** No, I'm sorry.

I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'm on a point of order.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** No, you're not. You're debating adjournment.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I haven't had an opportunity. Please allow me the opportunity to finish. You're not the chair here, sir.

**The Chair:** I'm going to finish hearing Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that.

Obviously, Mr. Therrien had indicated that he had done some work and it was still unclear and I was seeking some clarification from Ms. Blaney as to whether she had done the same.

**The Chair:** A motion to adjourn debate is not really debatable, so I will hear—

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I wasn't seeking debate. I was just asking for that clarification.

**The Chair:** Do you have clarification? Then we will be moving on to Mr. Gerretsen's point of order.

• (1215)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** At this point, I am not being paid for anything other than one role, so I don't perceive a conflict.

Thank you so much for the question.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I was just offering that on Mr. Richards' point, that was not a point of order. He's asking for clarification on a question, which is a product of engaging in debate.

**The Chair:** Okay, I guess we can move back to Ms. Blaney's motion to adjourn.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'd like a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

**The Chair:** The debate is adjourned on Ms. Blaney's motion.

There is still official time in our meeting until one o'clock. What would you like? How would you like to proceed?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Can we adjourn the meeting?

**The Chair:** You'd like to move to adjourn the meeting.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I would like a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

**The Chair:** The meeting is over.

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