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Chair: Mr. Bryan May



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• (1700)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 15 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

We are starting today in public, as we committed to in the last meeting, in order for a series of motions to be brought forward.

If there's no objection, I will recognize Monsieur Desilets, if he wishes to move his motions. If not, that's fine as well, but we'll go directly to in camera to start with the report, if that's the case.

Monsieur Desilets.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This should go fairly smoothly. My colleagues have probably heard members of other committees talk about it. I am moving two motions today.

I will read the first one to you right away:

That all documents submitted for Committee business that do not come from a federal department or that have not been translated by the Translation Bureau be sent for prior linguistic review by the Translation Bureau before being distributed to members.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

Is there any discussion on the motion?

I have John and Sean. We'll go with John first.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My comment is probably very similar to Sean's.

One of the things that we've seen at other committees is an amendment that's been made of adding the words “members' offices” after “federal department”. I would move that amendment for the reasons that have been stated at other committees. We want to ensure—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: For federal offices....

[English]

Mr. John Brassard: After “from a federal department”, comma, amend it to read “members' offices”.

One of the things that we want to ensure is that all documents coming from our MP offices that can be translated internally by OLO and other places are not delayed due to the mandatory linguistic revisions.

I would also add “members' offices”. Like I said, it's consistent with what some of the other committees have done as well.

The Chair: That's an amendment to the motion. We'll have to deal with that first.

Sean, do you have anything to add to that?

[Translation]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): No, thank you, Mr. Chair.

I support the amendment.

If the motion is amended, as Mr. Brassard suggested, I will also support the motion.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Can I just, for clarification, check with the clerk and analysts?

Do the clerk and the analysts do their own interpretation on documents that come to the committee? If so, should they also be included in this amendment?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Benoit Jolicoeur): I can go ahead, Mr. Chair.

If the analysts want to add to this, they're more than welcome.

Per the routine motion, documents that are provided to members have to be in both official languages. In those cases, they would be translated by the translation bureau.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher): One exception is revisions to the draft reports. Usually I'll do the translation from English to French myself, to save a few days. That would be the only exception to that.

The Chair: I know that's not the case in every committee.

I'm wondering, if I'm allowed, to make a friendly subamendment to the amendment to also include our analysts and clerk. I wouldn't want to add to the potential delays if this is currently the practice.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: If you add my translations to that motion, it will create delays. That's for sure. For revisions to draft reports, if you add that my revisions have to go through the translation bureau, that would add probably three days to every document, at least.

The Chair: Okay. In order to add to Mr. Brassard's amendment, I would need consent from the committee. Is that okay? Is anyone dissenting on that?

Apparently we have a technical problem here. We're going to suspend momentarily. Sorry, we'll come right back.

• (1700) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1715)

The Chair: Sorry about that. We are back up and running.

We were in the process of dealing with Monsieur Desilets' first motion.

There was an amendment by Mr. Brassard, and I see Sean Casey has his hand up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

After your comments, I know that you cannot propose an amendment, so I will do so. I would like to propose a subamendment to Mr. Brassard's amendment.

I would like to add the following to his amendment: "the office of the clerk of the committee and the office of the committee analyst".

My subamendment aims to add those two offices. The motion already mentions members and their office, but I think the clerk and the analysts must be added to the list.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

We'll need to deal with the subamendment first.

Is there any discussion on the subamendment?

Rachel.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): I'm clarifying. I think the analyst said that if we did that, it would extend the amount of time for us to get reports back. I want to make sure we're clear on that before we support that or not.

The Chair: I hear what you're saying. I think I heard the same thing. I assumed it was a misunderstanding, but we'll ask the analyst to clarify that.

If we don't do this subamendment, and include him, in the ability to translate his own documents, that would lead to additional delays if he had to submit them.

Mr. Analyst.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: Yes, it would add delays to revisions to draft reports, that's for sure.

For example, in this instance, for this report, I was able to have it sent to you on the Friday because I did all the revisions myself. All the changes to the report that were submitted by all parties, I translated myself. That would have taken at least three more days, as I am obliged to go through the translation bureau for that. All the other documents go through the translation bureau, but I've been doing changes to draft reports myself for 15 years now.

• (1720)

The Chair: That's excellent.

Sean, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sean Casey: I want to be absolutely clear. The subamendment I proposed will ensure that we will continue to use the practice we are currently using. Isn't that right?

[*English*]

The Chair: That's correct.

Is there any further discussion?

I don't know if we need a full-on vote, maybe we can do a quick show of hands.

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

The Chair: Now we will deal with the amended amendment from Mr. Brassard to include members' offices and the clerk and analyst.

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

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

The Chair: Monsieur Desilets, thank you.

That took a lot longer than I was hoping, but if you wish to go on to the second motion, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: That's life. This will go faster.

The second motion proposes technical tests for witnesses. I move:

That the clerk inform each witness who is to appear before the Committee that the House Administration support team must conduct technical tests to check the connectivity and the equipment used to ensure the best possible sound quality; and that the Chair advise the Committee, at the start of each meeting, of any witness who did not perform the required technical tests.

I must inform you, Mr. Chair and respected colleagues, that the administration produced a report on this. The Board of Internal Economy and the Liaison Committee also agree. Yesterday, we went through a situation with a witness that was difficult for us, difficult for the interpretation and difficult for the witness. He was placed in a rather unusual situation. The witness did not know how to handle the technology.

So that is the goal of the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion?

I see MP Casey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Chair, the motion proposes what is already being done. That was clear at the last meeting. You did a good job managing the situation.

I agree with the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casey.

Is there any further discussion?

Seeing none, again, if I have unanimous consent, I can declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Excellent.

Monsieur Desilets, now that the motion has carried, before you move on I would like to propose something to the committee. It's a technical issue regarding the headsets. I'll explain what happened in the last meeting.

You'll notice that the witness was not wearing a government-issued headset. The option is given to the witnesses to request a headset. What I would suggest, with the permission of this committee, is that it not be optional, that we send these headsets that have been proven to be what the interpreters need and the technicians feel is needed, that we make them mandatory for witnesses and send them out. Would we be in agreement that this is the case?

John.

• (1725)

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Chair, this is just another technical question: How quickly can we move the headsets if need be?

Oftentimes witnesses might be asked two days, for example, ahead to appear at committee. Are we able to, or can we feel confident that we can get those headsets out quickly?

The Chair: Yes. It's two to three business days at the maximum. There are exceptions that we will have to deal with as one-offs. For example, the individual we had to deny speaking at the last meeting was actually in Florida. The deal that we have is with Purolator. I know we've been in discussions with the clerk to see how we would deal with somebody who is out of country.

What I'd like to suggest is that we move from making it optional to making it mandatory, and I've gotten direction from the clerk that it shouldn't be a problem.

Monsieur Desilets.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: I agree with the proposal.

A two-day time frame is usually reasonable. They are very quick in Parliament. I think it is our responsibility to provide our witnesses with proper equipment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Rachel.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Chair, I agree with that, but the one caveat I would like to have acknowledged is that if it doesn't get there on time, and we've done everything we can and they have a headset that works, I think that should be okay. I just want to clarify that.

Of course, if it doesn't work, I agree, and the chair has been very good at saying, "Sorry, it doesn't work" and protecting the interpreters. However, I'm a northern girl, and sometimes things don't get where they're supposed to when you live in the far north of our country.

The Chair: I hear you. I'm not moving any kind of motion here. I'm not making any kind of proclamation that somebody's not going to be allowed.

What I'm suggesting is that we change the practice of making it an option to send these out. Right now, it's dependent on the witness to request it. What I'm suggesting is that we just send it and say, "This is the device you need to use in order to be heard." I think that will speed things up a lot.

Sure, if there is a circumstance where it doesn't get there or it's not compatible with whatever the person is using and they have a suitable device that works, of course we'll let them move forward.

Okay? Excellent. Thank you.

As I said, I'm not moving a motion or anything like that. I just wanted that to be something that we can agree on and give direction on to the technical folks and the clerk.

Monsieur Desilets, you have one more motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: No, Mr. Chair. I am holding back the third motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Excellent.

Ms. Blaney, go ahead.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Chair, I have a motion that was given on notice on March 8 and I would like to read it into the record so that we can get that piece of business done.

The Chair: Yes, certainly.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: My motion is this:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the experience of women veterans, with regard to: (a) physical health, mental health, and safety concerns; (b) supports for their transition to civilian life; (c) sexual trauma during service; (d) housing and homelessness; (e) Veterans Affairs Canada programs and supports for women veterans; that no fewer than 4 meetings be devoted to this study; that the study consist of witness testimony from individual women veterans, stakeholder groups and departmental officials; and that the committee report its findings to the House with recommendations on how the government can improve its programs and supports for women veterans.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on this motion?

Go ahead, John.

• (1730)

Mr. John Brassard: Through you, Chair, to Rachel, we know that National Defence is dealing with a very high-profile situation right now. How do you see that as being different from what you're proposing here? I'm asking more out of curiosity than anything.

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I think it's very different. This is specifically focusing on the transition for female veterans. We've heard a lot about the physical health of female veterans and the fact that the system is still largely based on veterans being men and not women. There are a lot of processes that are not in place and a lack of acknowledgement of their health concerns and how women experience those differently.

We've heard from multiple women that there are some concerns around what happens around sexual trauma. We also talked not too long ago about housing and a safe housing environment. As well, when we look at housing and homelessness, we're hearing more and more that women veterans, 10 years after leaving, are actually experiencing homelessness at a rate that is higher than expected.

I think it's really important for us to acknowledge that we want to see more women in the military. Part of that means that when they become veterans, they get treated appropriately. There are still a lot of gaps in their service.

It's distinctly different. This is not going to be focusing at all on what's happening on the military side but on what's happening to women after they leave service.

The Chair: John, do you have a follow-up or can I go to Darrell?

Mr. John Brassard: This is just a follow-up to say that we'll be supporting the motion, Mr. Chair. I agree with Rachel. All of us do.

Cathay has been really engaged on this issue, as you know, Rachel, so we'll be honoured and pleased to support this motion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Samson, please go ahead.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you.

As with the initial question from John, I was wondering if DND was going to...if the study would start there. There are many pieces, as Rachel indicated, that would be very valuable for us to be involved in.

I'm just wondering, based on our plan for the year and the decisions of the subcommittee in the past, how this would fit in.

Thanks.

The Chair: Rachel.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I think it's important we're coming close to the end of some of our studies. I hope that the subcommittee will meet and go through these. Right now I see this as a motion being accepted, hopefully, and then let the subcommittee meet and look at what our priorities are.

I think this is a high priority, so of course I'll be advocating for that. But it is really up to the subcommittee to put together the calendar and then bring it to the larger committee to make a final decision.

The Chair: Monsieur Desilets.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Chair, I am very favourable to this proposal.

I would just like to remind everyone that this will give us ammunition going forward. This is not word play. It will give us a solid base to be able to implement our motions in the future.

I would like to remind you that, about two months ago, a series of motions were moved, and some motions were related. They focused on studies such as the one Ms. Blaney would like to carry out.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Desilets.

Is there any further discussion?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I would just like to say thank you to Luc and I couldn't agree more. When we look at our military numbers, we're aiming in Canada for 25% female representation and we're still at 15%. I think there's work to be done on that side, but there's also important work to be done on the veterans side as well.

The Chair: Thank you. Is there any further discussion?

Seeing none, Mr. Clerk, do you want to take us through a vote?

Marie-France.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): I just have a technical problem. My Zoom is unable to detect the camera suddenly. I apologize to all of you.

• (1735)

The Chair: We'll have a technician call you, Marie-France.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you.

The Chair: I can hear you. I don't have the ability to see everybody with their hands up, but can we maybe go through a vote here, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes, absolutely, Mr. Chair.

On the motion of Ms. Blaney—

The Chair: Benoit, you're muted.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: What is happening?

[*English*]

Can you hear me now? No, you can't hear me.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Perhaps in the meantime Mr. Davidson can tell us about the state of his Internet connection in his fishing hut.

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): York—Simcoe is lacking federal infrastructure dollars for Internet. That I can tell you.

We are, so you know, home to the Holland Marsh, which is the soup and salad bowl of Ontario.

The Clerk: Okay, let's try this again.

On the motion of Ms. Blaney.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 1)

The Chair: Now it is past our usual closing time for this meeting. Are we going to attempt to log out and log back in in camera or are we going to call it?

• (1740)

Mr. John Brassard: My preference is to call it, Mr. Chair, and resume a week and a half from now.

The Chair: I have MP Amos' hand up as well.

Mr. William Amos: Yes, I have a point of order.

I should have voted in favour. I meant to vote in favour, and I misread a discussion with our team. So with apologies, I'd like to request the unanimous approval of our committee to reverse my vote and vote in favour.

The Chair: Yes, thank you, Will.

I figured that may have been the case. Do we have unanimous consent to allow Mr. Amos to have his vote recorded as yea?

I see that we do. That's excellent.

Is there any other discussion as to whether or not we want to proceed with the reports in camera, or are we going to maybe reschedule that?

Mr. Scot Davidson: I'd reschedule.

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: We do have an hour and 20 minutes. I was told that the committee meetings were moved to 5:00 to 7:00. I'm fine to stay. Of course, it's up to the will of the committee.

The Chair: Okay. We've got two against and one in favour. Is there anybody else, please?

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): I have a meeting at 6:00, Bryan, but it's up to the committee.

The Chair: That's three that we'll lose in a few minutes here.

I think we'll need at least an hour to go through the report. The report won't take very long, but I think it will go longer than we have.

Will, do you have your hand up there?

Mr. William Amos: I simply wanted to say I also have another engagement at 6:00. That would be my preference, but I'll bend to the will of the committee as well.

The Chair: Unless there's a serious objection, I would suggest that we adjourn for today.

The voting app success today, and this week, has shown that, although we may be delayed, we're not going to be wiped out like we have been in the past, so we will have some time and runway to do this. It's going to take us more than 20 minutes to get through it. If we're not going to have half of the committee before that, my suggestion is that we adjourn.

Are we in agreement?

Thank you very much, and thank you, everybody, for your patience.

A very large shout-out to the technical staff who got us back on track. This has been a heck of a year for them, and it continues.

Benoit, please high-five the technical folks for us, because we can't do it without them. We'll do it virtually, I guess. A big thank you to all of them.

We will see you in a week, because we have a constituency week next week.

Mr. Desilets, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: I will comment quickly, as I don't want to drag things out.

I understand that we all have very full schedules. Would it be possible to consider sitting during the break week in two weeks' time? We are regularly handicapped by the Monday and Wednesday votes.

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