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## **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, May 8, 2012**

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**Chair**

**Mr. David Christopherson**



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•(0850)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP)):** I now call this 43rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts of the House of Commons to order.

Colleagues will know that we had planned to have our Auditor General with us today. You'll know from the e-mail I sent to you and the news release that he had a relatively minor medical emergency that needed to be dealt with. He's going to make himself available as early as Thursday, but of course that's at the pleasure of the committee.

We have quite a bit of business in front of us. We have remnants of the 2011 fall report that we postponed to accommodate the F-35 meeting. We need to reschedule that one and get it back on track.

We have not yet prioritized our chapters from the spring 2012 report, other than chapter 2, on the F-35, which of course we've been focusing on. So we need to work on that.

We have a couple of outstanding motions in front of us. The thing we need to decide right now is how we want to proceed. Again, I'm a little hesitant, because after we lost the steering committee, the easy way to do this was lost.

I have fretted, again, over this notion of what I was going to do when all hands went up, and—we're back into this—who got to control the floor.

I have to tell you, with nobody doing anything and the government putting their hands up, it's all the same to me. I've said this to you before. Twice I've asked for assistance. I've asked for it privately. I've asked publicly. Nobody's taken me up on it, so I'm still left with this impossible situation.

In the absence of a clear rule, I'll let a couple of people speak. But I'm not going to take motions. I just want to give you an opportunity. As I said to you before, it's an impossible situation. You all throw your hands up at once. Whoever gets the floor first has a bearing. The people watching may not see it, but we all know here that inside politics, it matters a whole lot.

Here is my thinking, at this point. With a clear majority, the government always maintains the ability to deny an opposition motion and/or to carry their own motion. The opposition, by themselves, cannot force this committee to do anything. They don't have the votes. The government has 100% built-in control. No one can do anything without the agreement of the government. Conversely, the government can do anything they want, whether

the opposition likes it or not, assuming they follow the usual rules of procedure.

With that in mind, all other things being equal, and given that this is an oversight committee whose sole purpose is to watch the books, hopefully in as non-partisan a fashion as possible, I'm going to try to bring some kind of fairness. Again, for those who may disagree, I am willing to host a meeting, private or public, to talk about a different way to approach this. But in the absence of that, I am going to go to the official opposition, then to the Liberals, and then to the government.

I am going to listen to interventions, probably from the government, if they want to make a different argument. But bear in mind that just winning isn't good enough in terms of winning the floor. We don't have a process that's fair. I'm trying to be as fair-minded as I can be, recognizing the mandate of this committee and that ultimately we're accountable to the public. We're the public accounts committee.

That's the way I'm going to proceed. I invite members to meet with me to talk about a different approach, but that's what I'm going to do.

I will now take any interventions. I will not accept any motions during these interventions, because my intent right now is to give the floor to the official opposition, at which time they will have the full right to the floor.

Right now I'm going to give people an opportunity to give me a little input into that decision, particularly from the government, since they would likely have the greatest difficulty with this. With that understanding, I'm willing to hear from Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I'd just like to point out that I've been on this committee for three and a half years. My colleague Mr. Kramp has been on this committee a lot longer than that, as have you. Because of that, you know full well, Chair, that committee business historically, traditionally, has always been done in camera. It's not just something that this committee has practised; it's something that all committees have practised, in fact.

Therefore, yesterday when I received your agenda, which says “Committee Business”, “Televised”, this is absolutely unprecedented. It is absolutely unusual for this committee—any committee, for that matter. It's got nothing to do with openness or not being open, because we've exercised openness on many occasions on this committee. As you've seen recently, we've even gone against practice, at times, to be open. This is a matter of your setting a very wrong precedent, in my opinion, and you're going down a very slippery slope.

This is committee business. If you want to change the rules of all committees, that's something that should be taken up perhaps in a different forum. But what you have done here, Chair—because it was your decision—is to start a precedent that goes counter and against anything that's ever happened in the public accounts committee, to my knowledge, certainly in the three and a half years that I've been on the committee. I'm sure Mr. Kramp would join me in saying that this is an unprecedented move. I understand where you're going, but I think it's a very slippery slope you have decided to go down.

I'd like to share my time with Mr. Kramp. I'm sure he has a few things he'd like to say on this subject as well.

• (0855)

**The Chair:** Of course.

Mr. Kramp, you have the floor, sir.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

With the greatest of respect to the chair, I do agree wholeheartedly with Mr. Saxton, as you would expect. This isn't a question, quite frankly, of who goes first; I think we all understand the realities and the implications of such. But I take great umbrage with the chair unilaterally making the decision that totally changes the direction this committee has generally worked with, as Mr. Saxton has stated.

To use the argument or the discussion point that the government has control because they have more members, well, whether a government has more members or the opposition has more members.... I've sat on a committee that was obviously on the other side of the coin. I've sat in the position where we have been the government, and the opposition have had more members. It was reversed.

To suggest that from this point, because the government has more members they take the back seat all the time is arbitrary, I do believe, and I honestly believe in my heart that it's an abuse of the chair's privilege. It's an abuse of the chair's responsibilities. I do see it as a direct partisan move, with the greatest respect to the chair. I can understand why the opposition wish to go that route. I understand the discussions that take place among all the opposition. It's a clear-cut strategy, and it is unfortunate, because as we move through an event like this and the subsequent examinations, this sets a precedent that I'm concerned will potentially be challenged through the House procedures—I don't know—as we move forward. I would hope that we would never get to that.

I suppose I can sum it up with a very simple word: I'm disappointed. I really am. I think this now takes the obvious politicization of this committee.... Now the chair has, willingly or

not, knowingly or not—and I'll try to be deliberately vague here out of consideration for my past history with the chair—led us into an abuse of the work of the committee.

We saw that once before, in a previous chair. We've had some marvellous chairs, we really have—and no umbrage, again, toward this chair—but we saw where all of a sudden it became a one-sided coin. I do understand the dilemma the chair finds himself in with regard to having to pass judgment on whose hand is up first and that kind of thing. I understand there's an ongoing challenge to deal with that, and I do agree with the chair that we should have a process. It would certainly take that off the shoulders of the chair. But with the chair's ruling on an interim way forward until we come to that agreement, I think it is partisan, and I state that, once again, with respect. To arbitrarily just put the government to the back of the bus, and that's the way it's going to be.... Even if there were rotation, even if there were other members....

We saw what happened the last time. This is the process the opposition and the chair followed. Mr. Saxton's hand obviously was up first in the last meeting, and the chair arbitrarily ruled that no, the opposition parties are going to go ahead. Then Mr. Saxton was afforded the opportunity.

Now we're saying the same thing again. What we're doing now is we're building upon a wrong and making more wrongs, and I feel the direction of the committee has been hampered. I would certainly hope that we can in the very near future find a way we can move out of this uncomfortable situation, because now we are politicizing this committee. At the very least, moving forward there should be and could be an alternate, one versus the other—the government side, the opposition side; the opposition side, the government side—whatever way we do move forward. I think the chair sees where I'm going on this.

But to just say that because you have a majority on the committee your concerns and rights aren't going to be respected, we'll just throw you at the back of the bus....

I'll close now by saying I am disappointed, and I wish the chair would reconsider.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Saxton. Get it all on the table.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** I just wanted to add that I know the chair would like to be fair—he says that he would like to be fair, and I take him at his word. You have had this dilemma for some time now, and the last time you decided to choose the opposition first. So I think the only way to be fair now is to allow the government to go first, and until we come up with a better system, you alternate who goes first. I think that's the only way to be fair.

Otherwise, as Mr. Kramp says, you're throwing us to the back of the bus, and you know that's not going to last. It's just totally unfair.

● (0900)

**The Chair:** Okay, let me throw a couple of things out in response.

Let me deal with the last point first. In terms of alternating, that was one of my suggestions. I said we could rotate who goes first, but nobody took me up on that. To offer that up as an alternative to a decision I had to make in the absence of any alternatives being offered up by anyone is patently unfair. I'm open to the idea of alternating. Ideally it would be nice if we could come to an agreement, rather than having the majority decide what's going to be fair from their perspective only.

Next, let me just say that the issue of recognizing first and being in camera or public are two different things. The issue of who I see first plays almost—not quite, but almost—as big a role when we're in camera. Whoever's first gets a chance to command the floor, because when you have the floor you have the right to make motions. By making motions you can command and control the floor. By virtue of doing that, you de facto control the agenda. So it matters, whether we're in camera or we're in public, who has the floor and who gets the floor. That's why we're always so scrupulous about taking a list of who speaks, trying to make sure the order is accurate, and doing the best we can to be fair with the time allocation. So that's a separate issue.

With regard to the issue we are dealing with right now, for every single F-35 meeting I have, as chair, received requests from media saying “We would like to be there for that meeting. We would like to broadcast or record the entire proceedings. May we have your permission to come in?” Sometimes there are requests from representatives of three, four, or five mainstream TV media in particular, and they have all the equipment. That means we would have all these crews walking around here while the committee was trying to do its business.

So it's a lot easier, it seems to me, for us, and surely a lot easier for the media, if we just agree to flip the switch and we throw the cameras on that are in here. I can't say to the media, “No, you can't come, because the committee members don't want you”, and I'm not sure that there's any one of you here that would want to lead that charge, although you're welcome to. So I have two choices. I can allow the media to come in with their cameras and equipment and crews, or we can take advantage of the fact that we have installed the television cameras. That's been my rule of thumb.

There have been one or two occasions when the issue was so big that before the media even bothered to call, I looked to see if the meeting would be televised, because it was just that obvious. Some of those things are at the discretion of the committee chair. I've tried to be particularly careful around the F-35 because it's so politically explosive, and we all know that substantive issues can morph into procedural issues really quickly, and procedural issues can take over a meeting, as they are doing now.

So there is the issue of whether we are in camera or not.

The other thing I want to mention is that at one of the meetings in the last few weeks when we dealt with committee business, every one of us, I'm going to say to you, was expecting the government would move to go in camera, and it didn't happen. Everybody on the committee agreed to stay in public, and we did the entire committee

planning. Most of it—I believe all of it, but certainly most of it—was on the F-35.

So who am I to presume what the will of this committee is when it's dealing with further organizing around the issue of the F-35, when the unanimous decision, in the absence of any motion to go in camera, was the decision of this committee? If I went in camera someone could easily say, “Wait a minute. What gives you the right to unilaterally decide this one is going to be in camera when we as a committee chose, by unanimous consent, to do all that business in public? Who are you, Chair, to do that?”

I'm ready to accept when I'm wrong. I'll take my lumps, and I make my mistakes as everybody else does. But I want colleagues to know....

Oh, the other thing I want to say is that I have not had one word—and you can put down any religious document you want and I'll put hands all over it—of discussion with any opposition member about how things are going to proceed and how there's going to be some kind of trap set for the government. That doesn't happen when I'm in the chair. And they can vouch for me. Any time you see me talking to the opposition members, it's about procedural things that are already known, or they're asking me a detail. It's no different from when Mr. Kramp or Mr. Saxton approaches me in the House.

● (0905)

So there are no deals. I'm not going to destroy my opportunity to try to continue to bring the respect that this committee needs. I'm not going to put that in jeopardy by playing monkey games, especially in a majority House, where the government wins ten times out of ten. It's far more important to me that this committee and my chairing be respected as being fair and non-partisan, as much as humanly possible in this arena, recognizing that I am a partisan.

So I'm open to further thoughts, but that's how we got where we are. That's been my thinking as we've moved forward. I'm in the hands of the committee, as always.

Mr. McKay.

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

As you know, I'm not a regular member of this committee. I'm substituting for Mr. Byrne, who, I'm sure everyone will be pleased to know, is recovering from pneumonia. He may be not present for a while. So I've not been privy to all the machinations, shall we say, with respect to this committee and its setting of the agenda.

I don't disagree with Mr. Saxton's observation that most committee agenda-setting is done in camera. I don't dispute that. I've been here 14 years, and that's generally true.

It ceases to be in camera when there's a sense that there's an unfairness that has happened, or may happen, or could happen. So the working presumption of being in camera—i.e., there's some give and take, everybody gets a little something, opposition parties get to direct some part of the agenda—all of that is a working presumption of a steering committee. That presumption seems to have gone out the window here. It appears to have gone out the window because of an enthusiasm, particularly on the part of the government, to not have the deliberations of the committee with respect to the F-35 any more public than they absolutely have to be.

As a consequence, the deliberations with respect to the direction and agenda of this committee are, at the opposition's desire, in public and on television thus far. I just thought that there is an irony in the name of this standing committee. It is the public accounts committee. Generally speaking, public should be preferenced over private, because it is one of the very few opportunities members of the opposition have to actually ask real questions and potentially get real answers with respect to issues such as the F-35.

I'm here to move Mr. Byrne's motion on the F-35, and I'm just flipping through it—actual statement of operational requirements, full life-cycle analysis, bid evaluation criteria. All of that is stuff the public is interested in. Why there would be such a resistance.... If there's anything that is in a nature of a secretive aspect to any of this stuff and that imperils national security in any way, I'm sure any witness will bring that to the clerk's or your attention, sir, and say that on this item, or this item within this item, the committee should not be studying it in public and possibly no one outside of the Privy Council should be studying it.

Working on the presumption that a public accounts committee is first and foremost public, my sense of it is that motions and even this discussion need to take place in public. Your ruling is correct.

I would say finally that this entire matter can be resolved in a heartbeat, if in fact Mr. Saxton on behalf of the government simply allows the motions that the opposition wish to put forward to take place in public and the votes to take place in public. It's pretty simple that way.

Thank you for that opportunity.

● (0910)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I apologize, Monsieur Ravnat, I should have gone to you first, as I'd outlined earlier. You now have the floor, sir.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP):** That's okay.

I was listening very carefully to what my colleagues were saying on the other side. To a certain extent I would be sympathetic to what

they were saying, provided we were in an ideal situation. The reality is that this public accounts committee is not functioning like the public accounts committee did in the past. There's very little goodwill to proceed with the important oversight function we have. The subcommittee, which could be the place where we would create some form of consensus around witnesses heard and the agenda, has been abolished by my Conservative colleagues.

If we were in that ideal situation, then of course it would be normal to have our procedures to decide on the agenda and so forth in camera. The reality is that it's not normal, which begs the need to make public what the opposition is proposing and to have the government or other members of the committee deliberate on this issue as well as share their opinion. I think Canadians have a right to know that there has been a request to hear from certain witnesses and that this request has been denied, for whatever reasons.

So I think I'd like to come back. Obviously I sympathize with the chair's situation. I think it's untenable to play the gunslinger approach in trying to get the floor. It's an unacceptable way of proceeding. I think I speak for my other opposition colleagues that we're clearly willing to speak with the Conservatives, with the government side, to talk about how we could get out of this impasse, maybe reconstituting a subcommittee, so we could go forward with a more consensus-based approach with regard to the length of debates and the witnesses we want to hear from.

Canadians have a right to know there are people around the table who want to hear from people like the minister, Peter MacKay, on F-35; Julian Fantino, obviously, the associate minister; and the public works minister. The debate was such in the last few weeks that it begs that we bring these people forward. We're far more uncertain as to what went on than we were before, and the only way to clarify this for Canadians is to continue this debate and call the proper witnesses.

I also would like to add that procedure can be used as a weapon to silence debate. This government has had a poor record since May 2 in that regard, in using procedural process to close debate.

I forgot to mention that I should probably share my time with Mr. Allen, as Mr. Saxton did with Mr. Kramp.

**The Chair:** Very well.

Mr. Allen.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

Let me start by talking about this idea, which was in place last fall when I returned to this committee, of how quickly one gets one's hand up and whether one competes or not. If you go back and look at the record, you will see that the government side probably won that race 80% of the time, if not more. It became very apparent to me, as the lead of the opposition side at that time, that it was a futile attempt to out-race Mr. Saxton, for a couple of reasons. One is that I had two surgeries on my right shoulder many years ago, and it doesn't really work all that well, and he's much younger than I am and much faster, so I wouldn't have won the gunslinger race anyhow. I say that somewhat facetiously, but I wouldn't have. It's kind of not funny. But I could have called the procedural piece and said, "Chair, Mr. Saxton's hand was up before you gavelled the meeting to order; he's now out of order." You cannot get the attention of the chair before the chair is actually in the chair, which happens when he gavels the meeting to order. But I didn't pull that stunt because I felt we could probably work this out.

The reason we're at this point now, as Mr. Ravnat clearly pointed out, is that there were issues with the steering committee. I do not lay the blame solely at the feet of the government for that, but there is a way this needs to be resolved. The chair has asked for some form of intervention from us to try to figure this out, and we have not been helpful in resolving that. We need to do that on a go-forward basis. The public accounts committee will not end at the end of the F-35 hearings. It will continue on until the end of this Parliament, and we need to find a way to make it work.

Let me restate what I stated about a week and a half ago, about whether this side has ever approached the chair because he's in our caucus. I stated unequivocally then, and I stand by it now, that I have never, nor would I ever, nor do I intend to in the future approach the chair to try to help me get recognition at this committee. I don't do that for two reasons. One is out of respect for the chair, regardless of who the person is who sits in it. Let me personalize it. I have known this chair for about 30 years, from a previous life, not when he was in government but indeed when we belonged to the same union. For those who have been in a union and who understand what the hard stick is, if I even made an attempt, the hard stick would have come down on top of me and it wouldn't have felt very pleasurable. I understand there's no reason to do that, and the chair wouldn't tolerate it. So let me state that clearly for the public to know that it has never happened from this side, from New Democrats on the opposition side, nor do we intend to do that on a go-forward basis.

Clearly, there is an issue around the F-35. It's a very public issue. The government acquiesced and decided to stay in public. If folks had been betting on the last time we stayed in public on a witness list, and the bets were that you would not stay in public, that you wanted to go in camera, all of those who had bet that way would have lost. Now you want to go in camera even though we still have that to discuss. That's it, the dilemma.

The other side of it is clearly in the G-8, where we wrote, as an opposition, a major dissenting report. We clearly had issues. You can see our trepidation about going in camera when our experiences are not joyous when it comes to the government's will to decide to go forward or not go forward. We wanted to go forward; you didn't, so we did not. You can see how we on this side are looking at you and

saying we still wish to go forward. What happens if we go in camera and you decide you do not?

You extended the olive branch at the beginning. I would suggest that you continue to extend it, at least on the F-35, to deal with this and get it back on the rails as far as the witness list is concerned and what we intend to do with that piece, since you started down that road. On the other pieces, I think you need to decide where you want to go and how you do that as a process. I think if we end up having a sense of actually being back on track working as a whole committee, we may find indeed that we're able to continue forward in a manner where there is trust on both sides, and we may actually start working on some reports where perhaps there is less political fire, because there's a lot at this one—I understand that—and the committee would get back to kind of a regular routine.

• (0915)

I would point out one statistic to the folks on this committee. I said it once before, but maybe not at committee. When you check the chart of who has the most in camera meetings, it's us. Part of that's by necessity, because we write a lot of reports; it's not just because we're secretive. Somehow we have to find a way to be less apparently secretive. That's hard, and I don't suggest it's not.

I look to my colleagues to try to help that process. I hope you will consider continuing, at least for the F-35s, to show willingness to actually get to the bottom of what happened with this project, and do it in a public manner. I think it would suit the government better, but again it's their decision to make to keep it open rather than closed, for all the apparent reasons of the political pieces that fall into that. Regardless of what you do behind closed doors, will anybody believe you? I don't know.

At this point, on the believability around the F-35 file—and it's just that file the committee is looking at—I don't think you have a lot of trust on that one, folks. So I suggest you try to keep it open.

At the end of the day, I recognize the reality of seven versus four and how that vote can turn out. But I offer my comments and we'll see where it takes us.

Thanks, Chair.

• (0920)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Allen.

I have first-time speakers and second-time speakers. I'll complete the first-time speakers.

Mr. Shipley, you have the floor, sir.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, you've sort of laid out a couple of things. One is the issue around first to speak, and the second one is.... I have to tell you, as colleagues, I wasn't sure what was happening when I read the agenda, which indicated "televised". Mr. Chair, I think your words were, "Well, it's just easier to flip the switch and have the televisions on".

I would never be, and I don't think we should ever be, concerned about the work the media goes through to come to a public meeting. That's their job. If they choose to come, then they come. The meetings are public, and they can do that in any of the meetings. In fact, I'm on the international trade committee, and if they choose to come to those public meetings, they can bring all their equipment, and that's what they do.

I am concerned that we have taken a significant step to televise something that has been, in my history on this committee, limited to when the Auditor General comes, or when we do estimates and the ministers come. That is pretty much when we televise. We know that ahead or we're told ahead, and in this particular case it came out in the agenda. As has been mentioned, it is a direction where we as a committee are going down the wrong road when we can just say we'll just flip the switch and we'll televise the whole thing, taking away from the responsibility of the media to come and report public meetings.

All of the dialogue in an open public meeting is in the blues for anyone to read.

I also sat on this committee when we were in a minority government. I'm not sure where the big surprise is. In the committees I've been on over my six years here, committee business has always been done in camera. We made some exceptions the other day, and obviously they may or may not have been the right ones, but we decided we would just move ahead with some committee business.

Here we are now going back to what has been the standard and the norm for committees when you sit down, because you're talking sometimes about finances, the organization of who is going to come and when they're going to come, and who is going to be here whenever. I think that's a bit like the business meeting at home with your own business. That is what we should be doing.

So when we televise that.... Mr. Ravnat had said that this committee had always functioned well. I can tell you, Mr. Ravnat, that before you got on it, in the last session, it did not function well. It functioned well when we had the.... Chairs make a difference in how it's run.

Sir, I'm not taking a shot, but don't let yourself get in the position where the last chair of this—in fact I think you agreed with us—was making arbitrary decisions and making arbitrary comments without consulting and following the committee. You cannot have someone making unilateral decisions, and that's what happens when we get into this predicament.

Parliament has been asked to have a four-hour discussion and debate on Wednesday night on the Department of National Defence.

As you mentioned, it would be nice to have Minister Peter MacKay, Mr. Fantino, and maybe Chris Alexander. All those folks are going to be there. It's going to be a great opportunity for all of us, quite honestly, to ask questions and for people who wouldn't normally get the opportunity here to have their opportunity in those four hours.

I think it is going to be a process that gives us an opportunity to follow. As Mr. Allen said, maybe we can be less secretive. I agree that much of that is because of the number of reports. If you go back to the number of reports we've been able to run through in this committee, in fact we're almost caught up. We're looking at an agenda here to deal with the reports of the Auditor General. There are six of them, and we've been asked to now start to prioritize them. Those are always committee business. We will decide how we're going to move forward with that, and then the other ones.

• (0925)

The other reason we're in camera is to follow the routine that has been there, which from my experience is that of committee business.

Mr. Chair, in a word of encouragement to you, and also a few critical words I must say, I would ask that we start to move back to doing committee business in camera, as it has traditionally been done. Let's move ahead so we can not only resolve the F-35 one, but also start to put together the agenda for the 2012 spring reports.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Just so we don't get too far off track, again I want to emphasize that there are two separate issues. I can see how the government, giving it some due here, would look at it and say, "Televised, in public, committee business? That's not the way we normally do things," and leap to the conclusion that there's something untoward going on. I can at least see the pieces that you pulled together to get there.

I need to emphasize this, and I ask especially the government members to listen. In the past, it was debatable whether we were going in camera. That's what the race was about. Originally the race was about the government getting the floor right after I gavelled the meeting, because they wanted to place an in camera motion. Politically, we all know that the quicker you do that, the better.

But it does suggest that we do not have a rule that all committee business is automatically in camera. Given that it's the public accounts, it seems to me the default position would be that we are in public unless and until a motion is moved to go in camera. No one has ever questioned that. When we've been in an open public session, and there's a race to get the floor, when the government does get the floor, they move to go in camera.



There's no debate on that motion. We have a vote, the government wins, we clear the room, and then we do our business. But it was debatable whether we needed a motion. We do not have a rule that all committee business is automatically done in camera. The only thing that stands close to that, where there are no exceptions, is report writing. That we do in camera for obvious reasons, and that serves us and the public very well, particularly when we can find unanimity around a report, because that has impact.

The second thing is on the cameras. If you take what I just said and remove the TV question, the only difference here is that the media—as in every other meeting we've had on the F-35—advised me that they wanted to cover this meeting, and therefore they would have brought in their crews. And as in every other F-35 meeting up until now, I've said at that point, and only at that point.... There have been a few exceptions in the past, and nobody from the government questioned me when I made those decisions, when it was so obvious that it needed to be televised—just so obvious—but not very often. I don't do that. It's not my role.

But when the media says they want to come and they're going to have these crews here, I have said in the past, "Just flip the switch." As you can see, that's what we're doing now. The only difference on that piece of paper is that it says the word "televised". That's just a courtesy so that members know to wear their prettiest ties, that they're going to be on TV. Other than that, nothing is different about the procedure.

Had I not had the cameras in there, and had the call of this meeting not been on the notice paper, then we would have had those very same camera crews in here and doing what they do. It seems to me that all we're doing is making life difficult if we say we're not going to flip the switch and we're not going to use the built-in camera system to cover committees in this room, which is what it's designed for. No, we're going to keep those turned off, and we're going to force the media to come in here and drag their portable cameras and drag their crews in and do the whole thing. We've seen what that looks like in here.

They are two separate issues. I would urge the government members, in particular, to please respect and acknowledge that they are two different things. I did not, by virtue of what you've received, make a unilateral decision that we're going to do this in public and that we're going to have the glare of the cameras, whether the government likes it or not. That's not where we are. That's not what I did.

I have explained myself on the TV side, I've explained myself on the opening of this meeting, and I remain accountable for all my actions and all my decisions.

Mr. Hayes, you now have the floor, sir.

• (0930)

**Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to speak to the steering committee first, and Mr. Ravignat's comment that it was the Conservative colleagues who put an end to that committee. We may have put an end to it by vote, but it was the makeup of the committee and the lack of productivity of the committee that put an end to the committee.

The committee was a complete waste of time. It was non-functional. I would suggest that the way we're doing it now has been more functional than the subcommittee, although only marginally so.

I would also like to state that I'm not impressed, Mr. Chair, that you would choose not to accept motions, that once again you would choose to first give the floor to the opposition, which is what you did before, but that's okay. I guess that's your prerogative. But what I would like to know is what is the authority of the chair? Do we have something in writing that speaks to the job description of the chair and the authority of the chair?

**The Chair:** Please.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** No, I'm quite serious, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Come on, don't start that nonsense.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** I'm quite serious, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** That's what worries me.

**Mr. Bryan Hayes:** You speak to being non-partisan. A chair is to run a meeting and to chair a meeting, and I accept that. But on several occasions you have had last say to witnesses and you have had your say in an extremely partisan way to witnesses who have been up there. We can check the record on that. You have lambasted some witnesses as your last say as a chair. Quite frankly, I don't feel that's appropriate.

That being said, back to Mr. Allen's point, nobody has accused anybody of approaching the chair. I think there was a statement made on our side last time that the meeting was pre-arranged. What that statement meant, I think, was that when Mr. Christopherson came in, he automatically selected the opposition to speak first. So it wasn't necessarily pre-arranged with the opposition; it was pre-arranged in Mr. Christopherson's mind, which I suppose is his prerogative as chair. I think that's where that statement came from, but nobody has accused anybody of any type of collaboration, and I don't believe that's happened.

I do have respect for you, Mr. Christopherson. You do a really good job as chair, and I like you as an individual. I'm simply not pleased with the way things have happened today. The issue seems to be one of who gets the floor first. I think that's really what it boils down to. Once we determine that, maybe we can move forward.

There's been some discussion about doing it in a rotating manner. Maybe that's the way to do it. I don't know. Do we need a motion in order for that to happen, that we do that at each meeting on a rotating basis as to who gets the floor first? I don't really have the answer.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. McKay spoke once already, so he's on the secondary list. Are there any other first-time speakers?

Mr. Dreeshan, you have the floor, sir.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There are only a couple of things I want to bring up as we speak about the rotational basis. If you're looking at it and saying that we'll rotationally set it up so that if there happens to be committee business, the government side will automatically get it, but if it happens to be anything else, the opposition side will get it, I am sure we would start to see another conflict taking place with that.

This new ruling that you have for today, that you won't take any motions but we will talk this out—and it's great we're doing that—means that we listen to the commentary from the other side and everything they would have typically put into a motion that would have been presented here, with the political spin and so on that they have to it, and it then gets put on the table.

You know, they speak about the F-35s and concerns and issues. We've been entirely open with everything that has taken place here. Nevertheless, they got the opportunity to take another stab at it here in public.

Getting back to the discussion about the subcommittee, it lost its way when some people reneged on deals they had made. That's something we should talk about in camera at some point, not here. There are a lot of things that make it necessary for us to be able to discuss the operational aspects of the committee, but those are some of the issues that I have.

Again, back to the last meeting, Mr. Byrne hadn't even put up his hand, but he was recognized. The response might be, "Well, I thought I saw him put up his hand." You know, these are the kinds of things that cause issue with those of us who have come here to try to make this particular committee work the best way it possibly can. When we see those sorts of things, that's when we get the extra frustration that comes along.

I will leave it at that.

● (0935)

**The Chair:** Very good. Thank you, Mr. Dreeshen.

May I just comment again, very briefly? There is a difference between equal and fair. That's why they stagger the starting point in foot races. The person on the inside track has less distance to travel, so that's offset. So equal is not always fair.

When the government says equal, it means that the opposition may get to speak, but then before you go to the third party, you should go back to the government, because that's how we do a lot of our rotation, back this way. The element of fairness is such that when the government gets the floor, often it's to move in camera. Since it always wins that motion, it means the third party is denied any opportunity to have anything to say in public.

I hear what you're saying, Mr. Dreeshen, but the world doesn't collapse when things from this meeting are made public. In camera is meant to be a tool to allow us to work together more congenially, without the cameras, without worrying about saying something that's going to generate a headline. But it does not necessarily mean that things that would otherwise be said in public are damaging somehow and therefore they need to be kept under wraps.

I hear the government. Mr. Kramp, in particular, has emphasized this: going from the opposition, then before going to the third party, going back to the government. But I don't see that as being fair. It

may be equal in terms of the strength of the seats you have, but it's not fair.

Remember, this is an oversight committee. The opposition members, quite frankly, are usually the ones who are the aggressors and the government members are the ones who are often on the defensive—not always; sometimes the government will agree with things. That's why I went that way. It wasn't for any particular fairness to the Liberals or any kind of game; it was a recognition that once the government got the floor, it could be the end of the meeting in public. So the official opposition would have got to say something, the government would have got to say something, but the third party would have been shut down.

Maybe I'm overly sensitive to the concerns of the third and fourth parties because I was over there for so long. I was in the fourth party, and I was the only one, as many of you remember. I remember those slights. But I also remember how fair many previous chairs were. We know there's an exception, but prior to that, there was a real element of fairness, and I always appreciated that. It didn't deny the majority the right to make a decision. It didn't deny the government its rights, but it did make me feel as if my presence at least mattered, and that I had an opportunity to express a point of view from the fourth party.

So Mr. Dreeshen, with respect, that's why I do it. It's not a deliberate intent to favour the opposition over the government. I'm trying to provide an element of fairness, in recognition of the overwhelmingly omnipotent power of the government once they have the floor, because they can guarantee that any motion they move will carry. The opposition does not have that luxury.

The last thing I would say is the public accounts committee is not a committee where government members are usually feeling good all the time. It's a rough position to be in. It's an important role, but it's not an easy one. I can appreciate that from time to time you feel the pressure and feel the heat, but that is the nature of this committee.

All right, I'll go on now to Madame Blanchette-Lamothe as a first-time speaker, and then over to Mr. Kramp for a second time.

Madame.

● (0940)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP):** Thank you.

I will be very quick. I have to react when I hear Mr. Hayes' comments. As I see it, accusing the chair of not being impartial is unacceptable in this case. The chair of the committee has been mentioning for some time that he is not comfortable with the way things are being done. So you cannot accuse him now of taking sides and making partisan choices, just because he has given the opposition the floor on a tricky matter.

If he had not opened this debate well in advance and if he had not drawn our attention to the matter, perhaps our thoughts might be different. But the chair has been trying to lead this debate on what would be agreeable for a long time. In my opinion, comments like those made by Mr. Hayes are unacceptable. I am pleased that finally we are having this discussion on the way we should proceed in the future.

That is all I wanted to say.

[English]

**The Chair:** *Merci beaucoup.*

Monsieur Kramp, you have the floor, sir.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** Thank you, Chair.

I have just a few comments, some of them from the benefit of hindsight.

Like the chair, I've sat in opposition on this committee. I've sat on this committee with minority status and I'm sitting on this committee now in a majority status. One of the problems we have is that we operate without a subcommittee. There are pros and cons with all of that. My preference has been to see a subcommittee work effectively and efficiently. It streamlines our work here and eliminates a lot of the problems that come forward.

The disturbing part of all this—and I say this with all honesty—is that we started off this committee with a subcommittee. Though I may be taken to task for stating this, the opposition filibustered the subcommittee. I couldn't believe it. We were trying to come to decisions, and we had complete blockage and obfuscation at the subcommittee, which rendered the subcommittee useless. It disturbed me a great deal sitting there as a member on the subcommittee, trying to come to some form of agreement.

Mr. Allen recognized my frustration at that point, because we had to move forward. Unfortunately, we were not able to do so. This was not just one occasion. I've never seen this before in Parliament, not being able to move forward at a subcommittee. I don't know if it was a strategy, and I'm not going to suggest it was, or if it was just individuals with a peculiar focus and a set direction. But it's the first time since I've been in Parliament that a subcommittee was rendered useless. I thought it was tragic, and I believed we would feel the implications of it down the road. Well, here we are now.

I support the government on this position. The government did not play a role in it. We did not play a role in blocking that subcommittee. Unfortunately, the opposition did, and it should take responsibility for it.

I was deeply discouraged. Now here we are, going through the same thing that we could have handled effectively at subcommittee. But the purpose was to take any decisions or potential sensitivities or anything where we could find the hair in between and just refuse to do it. They wanted everything to be totally out of camera so they could make more political points. Once that happens, then you really start to lose trust in being able to work together. That is where this all started, and I say that with all honesty.

Maybe I'll respond to Mr. McKay's assertion. I respect Mr. McKay as a member in good standing, of long standing, a member with a solid reputation here on the Hill. However, Mr. McKay was probably not aware of how the priority of the F-35 study was progressing.

There were six chapters. If the government had wished to use the weight of its majority, it would not have had to study the F-35 first. We could have moved the priority. We could be talking about the F-35 six months from now instead of today. But it was a government initiative, and we recognized some realities and some government

concerns. So we decided to make this a priority. We agreed and made the motion to advance the study and make it a priority. That was done in good faith.

There might have been some people even within the government, at different levels, who might not have appreciated that. But the committee made that deliberation fairly and honestly, knowing that the opposition was not going to object to the study. It was a clear statement of fact. There was certainly no obfuscation on behalf of the government in moving forward on the F-35s. We have more than cooperated in advancing this as a priority.

● (0945)

We moved out of camera last time. As Mr. Allen has said, we expected to be in camera on this. Quite frankly, so did I. My personal preference was to be in camera, simply to maintain the consistency of our process. But then a number of people said no, let's make an exception to demonstrate good faith. Quite frankly, some people could misconstrue that as an opportunity to play to the media.

Let's just deal in good faith. Let's move forward. Let's see how it works. Can we effectively do this? Of course, what happened right off the bat? There was complete politicization of the process. Complete. We saw what happened at this committee. I don't have to remind my colleagues of what took place at this committee and how we became effectively neutered through the entire meeting. We simply, once again, had another filibuster, and away we went again. We just were not effective.

It didn't work, unfortunately. I wish it had worked.

If Mr. Ravnat and I have a difference of opinion, by golly, let's have it, with no ifs, ands, or buts about it. We move forward. We have some different thoughts. We bring motions. I would love to get back to that. But right now, we've moved this committee, regretfully, into a procedural process rather than an investigation-of-facts process. It's to the detriment of Canada and to the detriment, I think, of the parties involved at the committee level.

I'm disappointed. I don't know how we're going to get over this, Chair, I really don't, because the genie's out of the bottle on this. Everybody wants to move forward on this for their own political purposes. The opposition simply wants to grab hold of this chain and keep yanking it until there's no more life left in the chain. I understand that. The government, obviously, will at some point want to say fine, we have other business, so let's move on. I think we all recognize those realities.

I'm just suggesting to my colleagues that as we move forward, we all take a little deeper breath on an issue like this. And when the floor is given, hopefully there will be a clear indication of why. If it's to go in camera, obviously, there's a reason for that. But I would hope that once we are in camera, the discussion as to why could maybe take place. If at some particular point either the government or the opposition has a great deal of difficulty with that, then let's see if we can talk our way through it and get it resolved.

Chair, I would deeply love to have this committee get back on track. I really would. I have worked on this committee for eight years.

It's certainly no reflection on the chair. As I mentioned, I believe that your decision on this was wrong, but that's fine. That's just a difference of opinion, and we're entitled to that. If I didn't say that, I wouldn't be honest with the chair.

I would hope that we would move forward. I'm not going to belabour the point now. Denying the government an opportunity, in the chair's description of fairness, I think, quite frankly, isn't fair. It isn't fair, as I said in my comment earlier, to say to the government that because you have the majority, we'll listen to the opposition and let them talk, and if they want to make a motion, it's the same thing; we know you want to go in camera, supposedly, so by the time it comes to you, we're just going to hold you off.

It really makes things a challenge for the effective operation of this committee.

I will make a last point, Chair. I don't know what the precedent is for this. The chair might be totally right in his statement. I don't know. Right off the bat, the chair said that when you have the floor, there will be no motions. Is that the way it works? Does the chair have that latitude and luxury to say that if I have the floor now, I'm prohibited from making a motion? I've never heard of that before. If it is within the rights of the chair to dictate that, if the chair did that simply to try to move this meeting forward and have a pre-meeting before the meeting so that it wouldn't complicate this situation, fine. I can appreciate that. My concern, of course, is what kind of precedent that sets. Is it a process we follow, or is this an exception to the rule to sort of speed up our process?

● (0950)

I don't know. If the chair could at some point—maybe not now, because he might not have the answer—provide some clarification on that.... And it doesn't have to be publicly; it can be privately. It's not my role to try to put anybody on the spot here or make things difficult for someone, but I think we do have to have some clear rules moving forward, and I would certainly appreciate some clarification at an appropriate time on that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Kramp.

Let me just say that as the first vice-chair of the committee, Mr. Kramp, you've always been right up front. You play hardball politics; that's why you've been returned so many times. But there's no question about your fairness and your integrity. I take what you say seriously, and I appreciate the thought you put into your comments, as tough as they are.

We'll move along now.

Oh, by the way, if I can, you were right on the second observation. I was trying to find something other than just boom, boom, boom. Canadians aren't comfortable with that, especially with this committee. If they get a sense that somebody's just driving things, dictating, whether they think it's me or the government or anybody.... That's what I'm trying to avoid here; you're absolutely right.

I was taking a little bit of licence with the chair, but if somebody had called me on a point of order and said I couldn't give the floor to somebody and deny them the right to make a motion, then I would have had to make a ruling, and I probably would have had to say they're right and I wouldn't do that. But I do have the right to put a

suggestion out there, and if no one does complain, then by inference there has been unanimous agreement to do that, and we move along. Again, I was doing it as an interim step prior to that impossible situation where everybody wants the floor at once but not everyone can get it.

Let me offer again—especially based on the positive aspects, Mr. Kramp, of what you were saying—to representatives of each of the caucuses that I will gladly convene publicly or privately a meeting to kick around some ideas so that we can have a solution. I agree, the solution we have now doesn't work very well. But you will recall, I said from the beginning that it didn't work, and that no matter how I ruled and how I approached it, someone was going to be upset, and that was a given.

I'd much rather be enforcing rules everybody has agreed to. It makes my job a whole lot easier. It's when we get into this uncertain area.... And yes, some of it is the lack of a steering committee. I won't get into the politics of why and what happened, but the absence of an effective steering committee does hurt the work of this committee. In the past, when we had that committee and it was functioning the way it should, we did work better. That doesn't mean we still didn't have our moments, but for the most part it worked a lot more efficiently. We don't have that. That's a fact. So that's partly also why we're sort of lurching around here without as clear a focus as I think everyone would like.

Madame Bateman, first-time speaker.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to comment on some points that my colleagues on both sides of the table have raised.

First, Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe used the word “accuse” to describe Mr. Hayes' comments. I feel that the word is a little strong. Personally, I heard a comment on the process, but I heard no accusation. We have heard a full commentary. I congratulate you, Mr. Chair. I also heard Mr. Hayes compliment you on your work. So we have to find some balance. We also have to choose our words a little more carefully.

Second, Mr. Chair, I heard you say that you were concerned by the small third party and its ability to speak here. As you know, Mr. Chair, I am very proud to be here and I am very serious about the work we do for all Canadians. The third party has used time at this committee. Perhaps you could check whether the time the third party has used here constitutes a form of obstruction. There is certainly a lot of time wasting, if not actual filibustering. That is also part of your responsibilities in terms of the process that our committee follows.

Thank you.

● (0955)

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

[English]

Your input is always put so politely, and I appreciate that. Thank you.

[Translation]

**Ms. Joyce Bateman:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** We will go ahead, unless there are other first-time speakers, although I think everybody who wants the floor has had a go-around.

Very well, I'll go to second-time speakers. Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate that you've given just about everybody a chance to speak this morning for the first time to give their opinions on where we're at and where we're going. I'm not sure if we yet know where we're at or where we're going, but at least we know you've given everybody a chance to ventilate. I certainly would like to know where we're going and where we're at.

You made a suggestion that because your ruling was unfair in a lot of people's eyes, about relegating the government to third status on this committee when it comes to pecking order of who gets to speak first—I think even you would recognize that's not fair—you want to resolve this in another forum and another session, privately or publicly, whatever makes sense. Where are we going with that? Are we going to come to a conclusion?

Right now we're in a situation where, in this meeting and the previous meeting, you have taken it upon yourself to unilaterally make a decision that the government would be relegated to third status when it comes to pecking order. This is the second time you've done that. I do recall, last time you did that, you said something to the effect that this time you were doing it but there was a chance that next time you'd allow the government to go first, since you were allowing the opposition to go first this time. I think you might have even brought in the option of alternating back and forth last time. I do understand your dilemma about which opposition party goes first, because then if it goes opposition, government, then the third party wouldn't have its chance. Another option to that would be to alternate amongst the opposition parties and then government goes second.

So there are lots of possible permutations as to how we could resolve this as a committee. We have to resolve it, because the current situation is unacceptable. It's unacceptable to the government. You have even said you recognize it's not necessarily fair, as it stands, to do this every time. You did it once, last time, recognizing it wasn't really fair. As my colleague brought up, you recognized the third party even though it didn't even attempt to be recognized. I think that is also kind of a strange and bizarre thing for a chair to do, to recognize a party even though it didn't even attempt to be recognized.

Nevertheless, we've got a problem, and it has to be solved. The current status quo, which you created, is not acceptable, so let's find a solution. Let's set up another meeting so we can discuss this and come to a resolution. As it stands right now, we're sort of in never-never land, and we can't stay in never-never land forever.

• (1000)

**The Chair:** Thank you. I agree—although some would argue that we do.

Let me just say, for the record, that I did ask that question, and I believe it is in Hansard that Mr. Byrne said he put up his hand, because I was checking that. I think that's in the Hansard, because I was careful about that.

However, I accept the fact that the government does not believe the current ruling is fair—just as, if I'd gone any other way, the opposition members would be saying it's not fair. On balance, I'm comfortable that I made the right decision in the absence of any kind of agreement, given the fact that the opposition can only give voice when it has the floor; it can move a motion, but it can't carry one. But I can appreciate that the government sees that as totally unfair: you have the most seats and you're getting third place in the pecking order—how can that be fair?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** It was twice in a row.

**The Chair:** It was twice in a row, and probably a third, fourth, and fifth time if we don't find a resolution. I think it's equally unfair for the government to get the floor as soon as the gavel's dropped, move in camera, and the cone of silence comes over everything, automatically, every time, ten times out of ten. I don't think that's fair either.

I will take it a step further. I will invite representatives of each of the caucuses to meet with me on an informal basis to see if we can't come up with something. Maybe it will be as simple as rotation, and who gets the floor will just be the luck of the draw in terms of the politics that day. But we can avoid this.

What we need is an agreement, colleagues. An easy Solomon solution is not available. The best we're going to get is an agreement we can all live with. That's what we should be shooting for. I will convene a meeting with the purpose of trying to achieve a recommendation we can all live with. I guarantee you it won't be fair, but by virtue of everybody buying into it, it will be deemed to be fair. Then we can avoid what has been well over an hour now on procedure.

To get us going in a positive mode, does everybody agree with my intent to call a meeting, pull everybody together, and see if there's a solution? Is there agreement on that?

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** No.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Kramp.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** Mr. Chair, the longer we procrastinate, the longer we delay, the longer we don't have a process, the longer we're going to take to resolve this.

Why don't we do it now and get it over with?

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** Let's have this done and we can get on to our meeting. Whatever decisions are reached, right, wrong, or indifferent, we're going to have to live with them. We have had a number of suggestions. You've made a suggestion. Obviously the opposition members have made suggestions. Mr. Saxton made a couple of different suggestions.

Can we come to some kind of working agreement here that's going to be fair?

**The Chair:** If you'll allow me to continue to give people the floor and they don't move motions, we can do that. If we're going to get into motions, I can tell you we're going to be bogged down for the balance of this meeting. That was the reason for the informal meeting, to kick it around.

If the committee is willing to enter into a give-and-take discussion with the sole purpose not of scoring points or moving motions but of finding something we can all agree to, then that would be wonderful. I'd love to have that done. If you want to do it now, I'm in your hands. Mr. Kramp has suggested we do it now.

What's the will of the committee?

Let me go to Mr. McKay and then Mr. Saxton.

**Hon. John McKay:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I certainly appreciate the expressions of concern for the fate of the Liberal Party. It's quite heartening to hear.

**The Chair:** I did say the third party, but your point is taken.

**Hon. John McKay:** Yes.

As far as I know, the third party is the Liberal Party, and the Liberal Party is the third party.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Hon. John McKay:** Generally speaking, one refers to the party by its name rather than by its status.

**The Chair:** It just hurt to hear you say it that way. Your point is taken. I'll shut up.

You have the floor.

**Hon. John McKay:** I just wanted to point that out, but I do appreciate the expression of concern.

I also want to pick up on the comment that the government is omnipotent at this committee. I don't dispute that. We certainly know that if Mr. Saxton has his way, Mr. Byrne's motion will never see the light of day.

The government may be omnipotent, but it's not omniscient, and that is the point of this committee. The point of this committee is to review government decisions.

While Mr. Kramp argues that there are actually six things they could be doing, including border controls, interest-bearing debt, etc., it's clear that the F-35 issue is the first among equals, or way beyond the first among equals.

Just to give listeners and viewers some scale, this decision is in the order of magnitude of replacing the entire subway system in Toronto. That's what we've been arguing about in Toronto—updating and

replacing the entire subway system. That's the order of magnitude of the F-35 costing.

I'm quite open to alternate processes, etc. But from the viewpoint of the Liberal Party, to say that Mr. Byrne's motion will be automatically dead in the water if we adopt an alternate process is just a non-starter. I'm certainly open to see how that would happen.

I also need to point out that what goes around comes around. I've been on that side as well. In fact, I think I've occupied every position all the way around this table over the course of being here for 14 years. I remember when we were in government and Minister Martin used to say to me that he wasn't actually afraid of what the opposition's questions might be when he came before the finance committee. He kind of reasonably anticipated them. He worried about the government members' questions, for a whole variety of reasons.

Normally I sit on the defence committee, and when David Pratt was the chair of that committee he issued a report—this was when the Liberals were in the majority—that was highly critical of the government. Many of those recommendations were ultimately adopted by the government and have been subsequently carried on by this government.

You don't get the impression here that the government members are actually prepared to be critical, particularly in this F-35 debate. Hence there is reluctance by the Liberal Party in particular—but I dare say the NDP as well—to allow Mr. Byrne's motion and possibly others to go in camera. As you rightly say, the cone of silence will descend and Mr. Byrne's motion will never see the light of day.

Discussions on the cost analysis of the F-18, the phasing out of the F-18s, replacement of the F-18s, or infrastructure modifications of the F-35s—all of that stuff will not likely ever see the light of day, nor will the witness list that Mr. Byrne has proposed.

I'm quite interested in the wisdom of Solomon. I don't always see it here. I'm quite prepared to entertain any kind of process that allows Mr. Byrne's motion to survive and be fairly debated. I have no observations on the functioning of the committee—I haven't actually been here to see whether the committee, either in public or in camera, is functional or dysfunctional—other than the generalized observation that a subcommittee is always preferable to a debate among 12 people as to what the agenda should be.

• (1005)

So if you can point us, Chair, to a means by which Mr. Byrne's motion survives intact and gets a fair and full hearing, then I'm all ears.

• (1010)

**The Chair:** I'm not sure that guarantee can be arrived at, but hope springs eternal.

For the purpose of trying to move us along, the only obvious one to me—and I'll just throw this out there—is that we would actually do the rotation. We would say that, starting with a certain meeting, it's Mr. Saxton, such that when we call a committee business meeting, it's understood that the chair will recognize, in a preordained rotation, the following members.... And that will change each meeting. That's the only fair thing I can think of.

As I said, then everybody takes their lumps. So for a really high-profile meeting where the government would like to get in camera as quickly as possible, they may be lucky, in that today may be the day they get to lead off the floor, so they can move that motion and do it right away. Or it may be bad luck, and it goes over to the opposition, and they have to wait to get the floor. I'm open to other ideas. That's the only one....

That's the major downside. It's that the politics of how the day will unfold will be decided, in many ways, purely by who gets the floor first. But it would be fair, it would eliminate most of this, and I would at least have a set of rules to enforce that everybody's buying into. By virtue of that, I have to deem that to be fair.

So let me put that in front of you and ask the balance of the speakers to comment as to whether or not they like it. Also, of course, you have an opportunity to give us an even better idea, which I'd love to have if it's out there.

I have a speakers list.

Mr. Dreeshen. Are you just putting up your hand now, Earl?

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. So Mr. Dreeshen's here.

Now it's over to Mr. Saxton. Mr. Saxton had the floor. Then Mr. McKay....

Do you want the floor again?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** I wanted to follow up on what you were saying, because it is an interesting proposition that you have put forward.

Would you do that in an order similar to the speaking order that we have for witnesses, for example? Would you follow that order? Is that your proposal?

**The Chair:** It wasn't. It could be.

My proposal was more egalitarian than that. It was just that you're first today, Mr. Allen is first next week, and Mr. McKay is first the week after. Then we're back to you being first in the week after that.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** If we were to follow the speaking order, that might be something we want to consider. I invite my colleagues to....

**The Chair:** So what you're suggesting is that you—or at least your caucus—have the first spot. Then we'd just tick each of those off as a week.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** We just keep on going. We just follow the speaking order.

**The Chair:** Okay. There are two suggestions on the floor.

Do you still want the floor?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** I just want to say that I'm happy to hear what my colleagues have to say on this matter, but I do want to point out that an important member of this committee is not here today, and that's Mr. Byrne. So I would hesitate to come to any conclusion in his absence, because I know he will have something to say. I presume he will have something to say on this subject—

**Hon. John McKay:** It's a reasonable presumption.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Yes, it's a reasonable presumption.

So I certainly encourage my colleagues on the committee to voice their opinions, but I want us to keep in mind that because Mr. Byrne is not here, I think we should not make a decision without Mr. Byrne.

**The Chair:** Look, you two guys are making me crazy here. Mr. Kramp wants us to make a decision right now because he doesn't want this to hang around any further, and you're saying that it's a great idea, that we should come to an idea, but let's not make a decision today because we need to hear from Mr. Byrne.

The other thing I want to remind folks of is that as much fun as everyone may be having as we have this interesting discussion, we're rapidly running out of time to actually make some business decisions. At the very least—and we've been here before, and this is why lack of long-range planning isn't good—I need some marching orders for Thursday. Otherwise, we don't have a meeting.

With that, Mr. Kramp, you have the floor again, sir.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** Well, without having the capacity, following the chair's instructions, to make a motion now, I won't. I wouldn't do that to the chair based on a precondition we both agreed to, and the word has to be kept. It looks like we have a difference of opinion here. I think we're going to go around and around, as hopeful as I was that we could just come to a very quick decision.

I don't think it's a complex issue. Well, I'll take that back; it's a very complex issue. But I think we only have two or three legitimate solutions that are in front of us, and I'm not seeing any real relative unanimity.

I appreciate, Mr. McKay, that the chair is doing an admirable job, but I do know that if somehow the government were able to put a motion forward today to suggest a manner of going forward, at the next three to four meetings we would be simply wasting our time again, because I know I would have adequate comment from across from the third party.

In the spirit of still trying to make this committee work, I'll certainly be more patient than my normal nature is. All my life, as most of you know, I was in business. If I got paid for wasting my time, I wouldn't have stayed in business. Unfortunately, it is disturbing that when we are here being paid by the tax-paying dollars of hard-working people, and they see us just sort of in a bit of a straitjacket paralysis of indecision, it's frustrating.

I would hope that at a subsequent meeting we can all have some adequate time for thought. Recognizing the importance of moving forward, we can have a number of informal discussions, and I would certainly hope Mr. McKay would also pass those thoughts on to Mr. Byrne.

●(1015)

**Hon. John McKay:** He's watching.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** I wish him well, and I hope he is watching and he will take our word to heart that we do need to move forward with this committee.

I'm hopeful that by the time we come back for the next session, Chair, we will have already had a meeting in order to come to a decision on this and have debated this adequately so we can move on. We have to bring some closure to this at some point. Obviously it's not going to be today. I regret that, but I think it's an obvious fact, just from hearing the first couple of speakers, that there are some obvious differences of opinion.

Others may wish to speak on this issue or others may have some thoughts and concerns. I'm willing to take another swallow of patience pills until we get to one more meeting. But at that particular point, I can assure you that my patience, like yours and that of many others, will be rather thin, because we do have to proceed. We have to move on.

We could have simply.... I know I'm repeating myself here, but obviously we have always—with the exception of the last time, when we felt it imperative to demonstrate the government's commitment to dealing with this issue on matters such as this—whether it's procedure or whatever, gone in camera.

I just thought that might have been a slam dunk today, but I understand Mr. McKay wished to make his point by bringing forward a motion and basically going on down the whole list of many potential invitees that obviously are strongly opinionated, with no direct action or attention from a direct involvement with the file, but obviously it would have made for good theatrics and good politics.

I think that was the intent and is the intent. Were I sitting in his position, perhaps I would even consider following a pattern such as that. But I can assure the member, it's not going to make for an efficient operation of this committee.

That's all I have to say at this point, Chair.

**The Chair:** Very good. Thank you, Mr. Kramp.

Monsieur Ravignat, you have the floor.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** I certainly agree with Mr. Kramp that there are better things we could be spending our time on presently than trying to get some process. I think that should be taken off-line and we should be talking informally before the next meeting.

That's precisely the point. I think Canadians want us to be discussing things of importance. They want us to be continuing the F-35 debate and hearing from other witnesses. They want to know the consequences of Bill C-38 on the roles and powers of the Auditor General. They also want us to debate other chapters of the Auditor General's report. These are things this committee should be doing.

I'm speaking in favour of perhaps going forward here to try to openly discuss what we'll do for our next meetings, and then take the discussion with regard to how this meeting should function off-line with the chair.

●(1020)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I have one last speaker and then I'm going to make a couple of suggestions in terms of moving forward.

Mr. Dreeshen, sir, you have the floor.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll go back to what I had mentioned earlier about the concept of rotation.

If you look at the draft report we have here and you're going to each meeting that we're going to have and we end up with a game being played as to what we are going to put on this date, because we know the opposition is going to be able to start it, and what we are going to be putting on the next date, you end up with the same types of theatrics that we're trying to deal with here.

I think a person has to look at something a little bit more in depth, rather than just what day it is going to be, because then we'll be back to this argument. So I think as we try to think of ways of putting it together to come up with solutions, we should be cognizant of that fact. That's what I wanted to bring up.

**The Chair:** Very good. Thank you, sir.

That exhausts the speakers list.

Colleagues, I'm going to try again. This is the fourth or fifth time, but I'll add a wrinkle. I'll invite all members to forward to my office any suggestions at all, even if you have a bad one and you want to throw it on there, so that everything's being looked at. Then I am going to invite representatives from each of the caucuses to join me for a coffee to kick around what I have in front of me. Members can choose to attend or not.

I'm going to make the attempt, in the absence of a process, to lead to some kind of an agreement. We are going to keep repeating this time and time again. It's not healthy, it's not impressive. I'm sure there are a lot of Canadians at home now rolling their eyes, going, "Really, folks, that's the best you could come up with in terms of working together?"

So we'll continue to pursue it. For the time being, we could go through the whole political dance of in camera, but at 10:22, I'm not sure that makes a lot of practical sense.

Could I suggest that someone provide me with a motion that this coming Thursday we invite the Auditor General? He does believe he will be in a position where he can be here Thursday. Might I suggest that the motion would be that we invite the Auditor General for the first hour, which was the commitment we had made earlier, and that we then move into report writing? If it turns out the Auditor General can't attend on Thursday, then we would use the entire two hours for report writing.

That's the bare minimum we need to achieve today, folks. We still have a lot of work. We didn't get any of it done. But at best, if we can get through with an agenda for Thursday, all is not lost.

Mr. Saxton, are you going to help me out with such a motion?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Mr. Chair, I would like to follow your lead.



I would like to propose a motion that we invite the Auditor General to come on Thursday for the first hour and that the second hour be report writing; and should the Auditor General not be able to join us on Thursday, he will join us on Tuesday for the first hour and the second hour be report writing; and should the Auditor General not be able to attend on Thursday, that all of Thursday will be report writing; or if he can't join us on Tuesday, that all of Tuesday will be reporting writing.

**The Chair:** What worries me is I followed that.

Okay, I see speakers to it. Did you wish to speak any further, Mr. Saxton?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** I'm just putting my motion to the committee, and I hope that everybody will accept it.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Let me be very, very clear. I did say that I've never seen an exception to the report writing being in camera. I think that's about as close to a motherhood rule as we have. So unless I hear interventions to the contrary, I will direct that we move directly in camera, either segueing from the Auditor General or from the beginning of Thursday's meeting, all the way through. I want to be very clear on that.

On the motion, I'll take speakers.

Mr. McKay, Mr. Ravignat, and I saw somebody on the government side.

Mr. McKay.

• (1025)

**Hon. John McKay:** This is just to second the motion, Chair, and also to say that I like my coffee double-double.

**The Chair:** If that's all it took, I'll gladly buy a double-double.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** I'll even add a little something if it will get us through these darn meetings.

**Hon. John McKay:** You don't need to add anything, no, no, no.

**The Chair:** Well, it couldn't get any worse.

Monsieur Ravignat.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** I don't have issues with the motion.

I have a question about the report: we're report-writing on what?

**The Chair:** That's a fair question.

Alex, what's the one that we have teed up?

**Mr. Alex Smith (Committee Researcher):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The committee had considered a report on the Public Accounts of Canada 2011. Some changes were made. The committee had wanted to see those changes before adopting the report. That's one thing for the committee.

The other is that the committee had done a study on Canada's economic action plan, or the audit of that. That draft is now available for the committee to consider.

**The Chair:** And we would take it in that order.

**Hon. John McKay:** I'm sorry, I was distracted there. I missed that.

**The Chair:** That's fine.

Alex, would you summarize that again quickly, please?

**Mr. Alex Smith:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

So for Public Accounts of Canada 2011, changes have been tracked for the committee to consider, and then Canada's economic action plan.

**Hon. John McKay:** Given that I'm told that I may be substituting for Mr. Byrne again, could I get some background or a filler or some material from the clerk—

**The Chair:** Of course.

**Hon. John McKay:** —so that I can make a useful contribution, please?

**The Chair:** I can't guarantee that last part, but we can guarantee the material, sir.

**Hon. John McKay:** I'll guarantee the last part if you'll guarantee the first part. Is that fair?

**The Chair:** There you go. There's a perfect partnership.

Monsieur Ravignat, you have the floor.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** I would assume that we would also have time to discuss committee business at that meeting as well, right?

**The Chair:** Well, now you've touched on something.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** We do have to plan for the next meeting. The motion only deals with—

**The Chair:** Here's where it gets a little tricky, colleagues. I don't want to split hairs, but I went out of my way to say that I was removing any question of whether it was public or in camera, and if somebody has a problem with it being in camera, I will take the responsibility and explain what is the practice of this committee. I'm very comfortable to do that.

However, given the debate we just had about whether committee business should be in public or in private, to now deem that we're going to do committee business in a meeting that I, as chair, have directed us into is just somewhat problematic, because it brings us back to that question of whether the committee wants to do committee business in public or in camera. If I call a meeting for committee business, it's my ruling that we de facto start in public and only go in camera on motion. Therefore, that piece would have been eliminated.

So that's my concern.

Your thoughts?

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** So you're just suggesting that we then do committee business on Tuesday, then.

At some point we're going to have to address what we do in the future.

**The Chair:** Yes, either that or....

We have a bit of a backup plan on Tuesday.

The other thing we could do right now, which would be very positive, colleagues, is to reschedule the meeting that we deferred, where we had everybody ready to go.... What was the chapter, Clerk?

Yes, it was maintaining and repairing military vehicles. If you recall, we had that teed up and ready to go. We made a change when we brought in the Auditor General for a full session, which was much appreciated, but it's hanging out there.

If we could slide that in for next Tuesday, that would allow us to have a backup plan if the AG can't make it on Thursday. If he does make it on Thursday, it allows us to finish up our work on Thursday and have a game plan for the following Tuesday, in one neat move.

So that, colleagues, would be the easiest thing to do. That hearing has to happen. We've postponed it. It's from the last fall report, I believe. Again, we're getting a little bit behind on this.

That kind of a motion, an amendment to the motion, would really give us a nice sense of where we're going to be for at least the next two meetings.

You still have the floor, sir.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Could I suggest, since I would assume we're going to have this meeting on process and on the way the committee can go forward in a more positive way to discuss business, that we hold off deciding what Tuesday is, in the hope that this meeting with you and with our other colleagues—a more informal meeting—will bear fruit?

• (1030)

**The Chair:** That will not give us an agenda for Tuesday.

If I might, colleagues, just to complicate our lives, I'm reminded by staff that we have to do the estimates, and we have until May 30. We need to have the AG. We haven't had that hearing yet, and the only week that the AG is available prior to the drop-dead deadline is next week.

Again, it sounds like either next Tuesday or next Thursday we had better plan the public accounts hearing on estimates or we're not going to have it. I don't think the committee wants to miss that piece of business.

It would be best if we could schedule that on Thursday. Then we're somewhat flexible on Tuesday. Even if we didn't go with the report, the chapter 5, we could build in report writing. We wanted to leave that date flexible in case the AG couldn't make it on Thursday.

That's where we are. The thought would be this: the motion, AG first hour on Thursday, second hour report writing. If the AG can't make it that day, we bounce it over to Tuesday, May 15, and then the second half of that meeting would be report writing. Let's deem that if the AG does come on May 10, May 15 would be all report writing, but let's schedule the estimates hearing for May 17.

Mr. McKay.

**Hon. John McKay:** Just out of curiosity, could you do the second hour with the AG next Thursday as estimates—this Thursday coming?

**The Chair:** The only downside is with health, and because it was fairly recent. Mr. Ferguson, I really believe, is doing everything he can to accommodate the timeline wishes of this committee. My concern would be that if he couldn't make it on Thursday, then we would have the backup on Tuesday. If we built in the estimates, we're hardening up the meeting and leaving less flexibility.

**Hon. John McKay:** The other alternative is that if you don't want to waste your Thursday, you do your report writing on Thursday, and schedule the AG for next Tuesday, a week today, first hour F-35, second hour estimates. That way you're starting to move through your agenda.

**The Chair:** Another thing—again, just working this through, colleagues—is we don't have to have the AG on Thursday. If the committee feels that they'd rather have an agenda with some certainty, and they're okay just waiting a few days, then we could have the AG as part of what Mr. McKay suggested. Just directly this week, this Thursday would be report writing. May 15 would be the first hour F-35s, the second hour estimates. May 17 would be a nice slot to do chapter 5, but May 17 remains open. I kind of like that better, actually.

The trade-off for the committee is that you wouldn't have the AG this week on F-35s; you wouldn't have him until next Tuesday. That's the only trade-off.

The positive thing is that it gives us more certainty. There's a far greater likelihood that Mr. Ferguson will be back up to speed and ready to come on Tuesday rather than Thursday. I'd like to give him a little time if we could, and not push him. I think that's a good suggestion.

Could people comment on that suggestion first, please?

Let's have your comments, Mr. Ravignat.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** I like that suggestion. I think that stabilizes what we're doing. It ensures that the Auditor General can be here. We don't know what the nature of his medical condition is, so I think Tuesday is a good bet.

**The Chair:** Yes, thank you.

Is there anything further?

Go ahead, Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Chair, I think my motion adequately addresses the concerns of the committee that have been voiced by Mr. McKay and others. I would say that we should still stick with my motion as it reads. It does offer the flexibility that if the Auditor General is not available this Thursday, then he can come on Tuesday. It offers flexibility, which is exactly what we're trying to achieve here.

I would recommend we just stick with my motion as it was said.

**The Chair:** I do remind colleagues that we have May 10, 15, and 17 to do estimates. If we don't hold a hearing on estimates in one of those three slots, it won't get done.

I remind colleagues that we have ten minutes.

Mr. Thibeault, welcome, sir.

• (1035)

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP):** Thank you very much.

In trying to understand the whole process here and what we're trying to accomplish with May 10, 15, and 17, we need to have a meeting on the estimates before the end of May—is that correct? Did I understand that correctly?

**The Chair:** That is correct, and the Auditor General is not available the week of May 29.

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:** Okay, so then we have next week to ensure we have a meeting on the estimates.

**The Chair:** We have those three days: this coming Thursday, and Tuesday and Thursday next week, yes.

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:** We all wish the Auditor General well, but we have no idea if he's available this Thursday or not, so we—

**The Chair:** The information I received—and if there's an update, I'll gladly take it—was that Mr. Ferguson thought he would be sufficiently recovered to be here on Thursday. I'm the one who's suggesting that with health things you never know. I was just trying to provide a little bit of a backup, rather than risk having him cancel at the last minute or, worse yet, come when he isn't fully recuperated because he felt a sense of commitment. I do get a sense that's the kind of person he is.

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:** Yes. So the motion right now is saying for the Auditor General to come Thursday; then we're going to ask him to come again next week for the estimates.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:** It just makes sense to me to have the Auditor General here for one day, and my suggestion would be to make it Tuesday. We could have him do the first hour on the F-35s and the second hour on the estimates. We'll have killed two birds with one stone. We'd get the report writing in. I think that works. I actually agree with colleagues that we should do that on Tuesday.

**The Chair:** Very good. Thank you.

Something else comes to mind, too. If we do it that way, colleagues, what we would be doing is...

I'm going to wait until I have the attention of the two government leads.

If we had the Auditor General here one day—the first hour on F-35s and the second hour on estimates—we'd be truncating the estimates meeting. Normally it's a full two-hour meeting.

My personal sense from the committee is that we could probably do estimates in one hour. If we did schedule Tuesday firmly for both—the F-35s for one hour and then estimates the second hour—we'd have accomplished both, we would have met the deadline, and we

would have a game plan. And we could do report writing on Thursday.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Which Thursday?

**The Chair:** This Thursday. I'm just throwing this out there.

Mr. Saxton, your motion still has precedence. However, notwithstanding that, let me just say that the suggestion is we do report writing this Thursday. Again, as I have said, that would be a scheduled in camera meeting on my authority and my responsibility. Then the following Tuesday we would have the Auditor General in, the first hour on F-35s and the second hour on estimates. Then we can still decide what we want to do with May 17. We can do that either now or during the meeting on May 15.

It provides us with certainty, Mr. Saxton. Again, this Thursday would be report writing. Next Tuesday the first hour would be on F-35s with the Auditor General and the second hour would be on estimates. We've actually saved ourselves an extra hour on the estimates, because normally it's two hours, plus we would have met the deadline. I would not be impressed with our work if we did not meet a deadline like that. We've had this in front of us for a number of months now, colleagues. It would just be a sign of bad management, quite frankly, if we weren't able to organize ourselves in such a way that we could do this in a timely fashion.

I guess I'm looking to the government. The government has the priority motion on the floor.

With that in mind, go ahead, Mr. Kramp.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** This is just a thought. I'm certainly not speaking to Mr. Saxton's motion. I just don't want to get waylaid. If we have the Auditor General here for the first hour and we are scheduled to do estimates for the second hour—I have some personal thoughts on that, but I'll throw those aside right now—we'll need to have some kind of assurance that we're going to get to the estimates. I can just see motions coming on the floor at some point during the F-35 discussion, and we would end up in another situation, again.

Somehow the chair is going to have to ensure or find some way to clear the air, so we don't get caught up once again in procedure and discussion and the politicization of the event.

• (1040)

**The Chair:** I just want to be clear. We've got about five minutes left. Your concern is that we may get into motions on Tuesday in the first hour. That would then bump the second hour?

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** That's my concern.

**The Chair:** No, I'm looking for an agreement, and short of a majority or a unanimous decision of the committee to change that, that would be the order of the day, and I would enforce it, given the trouble we had getting there.

So that would be my understanding, ideally, that I would not allow anything that would prohibit the committee moving from F-35 to estimates after the first hour.

Mr. McKay.

Let's be brief, folks. We've got five minutes.

**Hon. John McKay:** I think it's a great idea. I just wish I'd thought of it.

I think we anticipate that you would have a full meeting and there probably wouldn't be any motions, etc.

**The Chair:** Can I get a similar commitment from the official opposition?

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Yes, I think that's fair enough. I agree with Mr. Kramp's sentiment on that. Besides, I think the full hour should be dedicated to asking questions of the Auditor General. So that's what our major concern is with this, so that's fair.

**The Chair:** Very good. Okay, I think we're close.

So, Mr. Saxton, would you be good enough to withdraw your motion?

Let me put it all out there. If you'd be willing to withdraw your motion, we would have another motion in front of the committee à la Mr. McKay, that this Thursday would be report writing, and next Tuesday would be the Auditor General, first hour, F-35; second hour, estimates; and the chair would guarantee that we would move from F-35s after the first hour to estimates in the second hour.

All right. Now, we haven't talked about the Thursday after. So that's what's before us right now: report writing, one hour; and AG, one hour. But I would need you to withdraw your motion and then I would accept a second one.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Mr. Chair, I don't think it's a matter of my withdrawing my motion. I think a friendly amendment to my motion could also satisfy the—

**The Chair:** Sure, if you're feeling that friendly, by all means.

We've got three minutes.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** The proposition then is that my motion be amended on a friendly basis so that this Thursday will be report writing. Next Tuesday will be the Auditor General, the first hour, F-35s; and the second hour, estimates. Do we have an assurance from the chair that the second hour will indeed be estimates, and will not wander back to the subject of the first hour?

**The Chair:** Yes, you do.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Okay.

And then Thursday of next week is also report writing.

**The Chair:** Or chapter 5 that's floating out there. Either one.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Which is the chapter 5 one?

**The Chair:** That was the one we moved so we could meet with the AG: chapter 5, maintaining and repairing military equipment.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Yes, okay.

Eventually we need to deal with everything that has been put off as a result of this.

**The Chair:** It's quite a bit of work. We don't lack for things to do.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** But we also have a lot more reports to complete.

**The Chair:** We have those two. Are any others ready or could be circulated and would be deemed ready?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Public accounts.

**Mr. Alex Smith:** "Regulating Pharmaceutical Drugs" is in translation and will be ready any day. I just don't want to promise it for Thursday. So next week —

**The Chair:** No, could you promise it the following Thursday?

**Mr. Alex Smith:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** I wanted to make sure we had enough work to do. So we could do report writing on the 17th also, if you wish.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** We've got Public Accounts of Canada 2011 that we could also complete.

**The Chair:** What's the status on that, Alex?

**Mr. Alex Smith:** Yes, as I was saying earlier, that has been before the committee. There are blackline changes for the committee to consider again.

**The Chair:** Sorry. Okay, so that's committee work. So we've already got it in hand. So there's that report, there's the public accounts report, and there's another one in translation that would be ready too.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Canada's economic action plan.

**The Chair:** Right. So that's what would be available to work on this Thursday and next Thursday. And quite frankly, if we can clean up three reports in two writing days, we will have done pretty well.

So again, to push a little further, what could be in front of us is report writing on Thursday, all day. Next Tuesday, the AG for the first and second hours, and the following Thursday, report writing.

That could work too.

Mr. McKay.

**Hon. John McKay:** I have no objections, whether it's an amendment or a new motion, etc., but I think we detected Mr. Saxton expanding Mr. Kramp's issue, and Mr. Kramp, as I heard him speak, was concerned about motions being entertained by the chair. You said the chair wouldn't entertain motions

I then heard Mr. Saxton say...F-35 stuff, in effect wandering into main estimates, and I don't think you can restrict the questions that members might wish to ask, so I didn't—

●(1045)

**The Chair:** That has to become—

**Hon. John McKay:** As a point of clarification, so that you're not put in an awkward position, I agree with Mr. Kramp. I'm not quite sure that Mr. Saxton—

**The Chair:** I hear your point, and that was not the intention. Questions that are legitimate and germane to the estimates that happen to relate to F-35 are absolutely fair game. What I would not allow is for you or anyone else to move a motion next Tuesday that would prohibit us from moving to estimates by virtue of using the second hour for F-35 only. That's what I'm saying, as part of this agreement, I will not allow. Beyond that are the usual rules and the usual questions.

Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** If we're going to be able to get this accomplished today, I think we'd better go ahead and vote on my first motion—no amendment, just the motion as it is.

**The Chair:** We're very close. Please, Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** I don't think we are.

**The Chair:** Let me try once more. Let me try the House once more.

There are two versions. There can be a short version and a long version. The short version is this Thursday, report writing; next Tuesday, the Auditor General with the first hour for F-35 and second hour would be the estimates; and the following Thursday, May 10, would be report writing. If you don't want to commit to May 10, then at the very least, let's make a decision for this Thursday and next Tuesday. I think there is agreement on that.

Does anybody disagree with that?

Mr. Saxton, I think I've got agreement, if you would stay with the compromise motion—your friendly motion, if I might acknowledge.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Mr. Chair, it doesn't adequately address my concerns, the amendment to my motion. I agree with you, we should definitely have something on the table for this Thursday, and hopefully for next Tuesday as well. My motion does take care of this Thursday and next Tuesday. So I would propose that we just carry on this Thursday, report writing, next Tuesday we have the AG for the first hour on the F-35s, and we just pass that right now.

**The Chair:** What about the second hour of next Tuesday?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** That wasn't part of my motion, was it?

**The Chair:** Help me out. Why not? Why wouldn't we do it?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** I think it was report writing, wasn't it?

**The Chair:** Why would we not do it?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** I put a motion before the committee and I'd be happy if we'd vote on that motion.

**The Chair:** Come on, now. We haven't been splitting hairs on motions. We're trying to find an agreement.

All right, let me see if I can get a bare minimum agreement.

Good grief. You know, people are not impressed with this. I know I sure as hell am not.

Thursday.... Please pay attention, government members.

**An hon. member:** Can we take a moment?

**The Chair:** Sure, let's take all the time in the world.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Mr. Chair, it's 10:47. I think we should move to adjourn.

**The Chair:** Oh, please don't do that. We have no meeting on Thursday if you do that.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** I just moved to adjourn.

**The Chair:** I was hoping you wouldn't push that. Please. You personally will stop us from being able to make a decision about what we do on Thursday if you do this.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** They're already stopping us from making a decision on Thursday.

**The Chair:** No, sir, they are not. If you do this, you will be doing it. If you want to wear that on your shoulders, you have every right. I recommend strongly that you withdraw that motion, but you have the right to place it.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Is there any compromise on the Conservative side?

**The Chair:** I'm about to find that out.

Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Mr. Chair, my motion was to have the AG come either this Thursday or next Tuesday, depending on his health. So the friendly amendment, from what I understand, is that it would definitely not be this Thursday. It would be next Tuesday for the first hour to talk on F-35s.

**The Chair:** What do we do in the second hour?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** This Thursday would be report writing.

**The Chair:** Fair enough. It will be report writing this Thursday. I think we're agreed on that one. Are we okay on that part of the formula? Okay, that's a given.

So now we're on Tuesday, and we can even agree on the first hour. Where are we on the second hour?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Why don't we defer that to this Thursday and we'll make a motion on Thursday to deal with the second hour on Tuesday.

**The Chair:** I'd rather make a decision now, I've got to tell you. Report writing or estimates, I don't care, but let's decide now what to do with that last hour so that the next two days are planned.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Okay. Let's have on this Thursday report writing and make the first hour of next week with the AG on F-35s and the second hour on estimates.

**The Chair:** Fine. Thank you.

I think we have agreement on that. I'll deem that to be moved. Only if necessary, colleagues, is there any debate?

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** That's fine with us.

**The Chair:** You're okay with that, Mr. Ravignat?

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Yes. Thanks.

**The Chair:** I appreciate your understanding.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** I also recognize the compromise that has been made.

**The Chair:** Very good. Thank you, sir. I appreciate your cooperation too.

With that, colleagues, we're going to take a vote.

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

**The Chair:** That motion is carried unanimously.

Further to that, this meeting now stands adjourned.

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