



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

OGGO • NUMBER 001 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, October 14, 2004

—
Chair

Mr. Leon Benoit

All parliamentary publications are available on the
"Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire" at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Thursday, October 14, 2004

•(1100)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): Members of the committee, I see a quorum.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(1), your first order of business is to elect a chair. I'm ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): I'd like to nominate to Mr. Leon Benoit.

The Clerk: It is moved by Mr. Pat Martin that Mr. Benoit do take the chair of this committee as chair.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Benoit duly elected chair of the committee.

I'm now prepared to receive nominations for vice-chair.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): I would like to nominate Paul Szabo.

The Clerk: It is so moved by Mr. Scarpaleggia that Mr. Szabo be elected government vice-chair of this committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Szabo vice-chair on the government side.

I'll now receive nominations for opposition vice-chair.

Madame Thibault.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): I'd like to nominate Mr. Pat Martin for the position of second Vice-Chair.

The Clerk: Fine. Is everyone agreed?

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Martin vice-chair.

I now invite Mr. Benoit to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Good morning, everyone.

I'd like to start by thanking you very much for your support and congratulating the vice-chairs of the committee. I think any of you

who have been on the committee before or who have watched this committee operate will know that it's a good committee. It operates as well as any committee of the House.

We are in new territory here, operating with more opposition members than government members, but on this committee I don't think that's going to be a big issue. I really do believe there's going to be a cooperative atmosphere in most cases, and I'm looking forward to it.

I've had requests to make this meeting as short as possible, and that certainly suits my schedule. If we could just go ahead and get started, we do have an agenda in front of us.

We're now down to the services of analysts from the Library of Parliament. Who would like to move that motion?

•(1105)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Are we just...sorry?

The Chair: Sorry. The motion establishing the subcommittee on agenda and procedure is first—the steering committee for this committee.

Would you like to go ahead, Mr. Szabo?

Mr. Paul Szabo: It's my understanding that we will have six members. That means that the blank in there will include plus one representative from the Conservatives, the Liberals, and the Bloc. That will give us two Liberals, two Conservatives, one Bloc, and one NDP on the steering committee, if that's agreeable.

I move that motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion deals with the services of analysts from the Library of Parliament: that the committee retain the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament, as needed, to assist the committee in its work at the discretion of the chair.

That's pretty routine.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I'd like to invite those analysts to come to the committee. I'll just give a very short introduction, but it's good to have faces attached to these people who are so important to the operation of the committee.

The first is Jack Stilborn. He has a PhD in political science and has worked with the government operations committee dating back to the early 1990s. He will focus on public administration issues and will lead the research team.

Philippe Le Goff, of course, was with the committee before. He has a master's degree in economics, and extensive public service experience. He also supported this committee in the last Parliament, as any of us who are here appreciate. He did work on the whistleblower's legislation, the estimates, and other matters.

It's great to have you here again, Mr. Le Goff.

Tara Gray has an MA in economics, combined with Department of Finance experience that will help her in dealing with the estimates, which are an important part of this government operations and estimates committee.

It's great to see you. Thank you very much.

You now know who to go to if you have any questions in any of these areas.

The next issue is quorum.

Mr. Powers.

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): I respectfully request that the gentlemen and the lady be advised of contact numbers for our assistants, and things like that, to be affixed to the minutes.

The Clerk: I believe those are on the home page of the website. I can send them.

The Chair: They are on the home page of the website, but if you like, we can certainly send them out. Good idea. Thank you.

A quorum, of course, is majority plus one. But when it comes to hearing witnesses, we normally allow a much lower number; otherwise, there would be times when witnesses wouldn't be heard.

Would anyone like to move the motion? We have to put a number in there: three, including one opposition.

An hon. member: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1110)

The Chair: Perhaps we can deal with the time limits for witnesses' statements first. We'll put it together in one motion. The other part of this motion deals with questioning times. We will see whether there's any disagreement on that.

First of all, perhaps we can deal with the issue of the time we allow witnesses for making statements. At some committees, as you all know, the witness may ramble on at length. We don't need that. I think we get most of our information from the questioning. At the public accounts committee they allow five minutes. The witness can certainly bring a prepared statement, which they will circulate as long as it's in both official languages—we'll deal with that later. That way, most of the time is there for questioning.

My suggestion is that we allow five minutes for the witness to make a presentation. What's the feeling of the committee on that?

Monsieur Gagnon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Of course it all depends on the topic, but five minutes isn't very much

time. I have a suggestion: ten minutes for the witness and seven minutes for the first questioner from each party. How does that sound?

[*English*]

The Chair: If we can first deal with the issue of the amount of time we allow witnesses for making their presentations, then I have a proposal for the questioning times. We'll deal with them both in one motion.

Mr. Moore, do you have a concern about a five-minute presentation time for witnesses?

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Is there anything prohibiting us from allowing five to ten minutes? We can have an expert come in who has a very precise presentation on a specific element, but there may be other people from whom we want to hear something a little more substantive. I don't see any reason why we can't put "five to ten minutes". Then at the discretion of the chair, depending on the subject matter, the witness, and their prepared statement, we can just say they have five minutes, then get a little hour glass and carry on.

The Chair: What's the feeling of the committee on that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Then we'll put in five to ten minutes for the time.

Now we'll just leave that part of the motion.

I have a proposal, in front of all of you in both official languages, on witness questioning time. If you look at what I've proposed, it would be the Conservative Party for ten minutes; the Bloc for five minutes, immediately following the Conservatives; the Liberals for ten; the Conservatives for five; and the NDP for five. That's for the initial round. Then there would be five minutes for each in the second round, in the order presented there: Conservative, Bloc, Liberal, Conservative, Liberal, Bloc, NDP, Liberal, and Conservative.

It works out fairly closely in terms of the relationship to our numbers in the House. In fact, I believe overall it's 40 minutes for the Liberals, 35 minutes for the Conservatives, 15 minutes for the Bloc, and 10 for the NDP.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Mr. Chairman, may I move another motion, one that in my view would be simpler?

I move that the first questioner from each party be allocated seven minutes and each subsequent questioner, three minutes, and that the Bloc Québécois be the second party to ask a question.

Mr. James Moore: Is seven your lucky number?

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: The Bloc will be up second then and will have seven minutes. After the first round during which each party will be allocated seven minutes, subsequent questioners will have three minutes.

An hon. member: That's an excellent suggestion.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Do you think so?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to back Mr. Gagnon on the idea of seven minutes, since that makes it more universal, but the point I would like to raise is that I don't think it's right to have the CPC.... That always reminds me of the Communist Party of Canada; where I come from, CP means Communist Party.

I think it should be CPC, Bloc, Liberal, and NDP. As you have it, the Conservative Party would have two speaking opportunities and we wouldn't have even gotten on the floor yet. In the interest of fairness, I don't mind the order you have recommended—Tories, Bloc, Liberal—but then I would like to suggest it should be the NDP. And I would like to see seven minutes each.

I don't think there's anything magic about trying to accurately reflect the proportion of seats in the House when we're at committee. We're of a little different status here at committee. That's easy for me to say, representing the smallest group, but I would like to believe there's a spirit of cooperation here that treats us as parties and not so much as majority and minority parties.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Chairman, I detect among all the members a wish to find something that respects the participation of all members. Since this particular motion does not affect any business that we're doing imminently, and we do have a steering committee now, I wonder if maybe we should take the time to sit back, reflect, make the representation to the steering committee, and come back with a steering committee recommendation to the next meeting of this committee. It might be worth our while just to reflect on it, and then we can pass it at the next meeting.

• (1115)

The Chair: Just before we go to that, perhaps I could suggest an amendment right now and see if we can just agree to it readily. To respect Mr. Martin's request, we could just change, in the information sheet you have on time limits, the order of the Conservative and the NDP. That way the NDP would go before the Conservative had a second round. We could go seven or eight minutes.

We have smaller committees than we've had in the past, so we could allow a little more time, seven or eight minutes, for questioning right through the first round, and then go to the second round as proposed, as laid out.

Would that work for everyone?

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Mr. Chairman, I moved a motion which, if I understand correctly, was seconded by Mr. Martin.

An hon. member: That's right.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: What about my motion? I suggested that the first questioner from each party be allocated seven minutes in the first round, beginning with the Conservative party followed by the

Bloc. I believe Mr. Martin seconded the motion. What happens now? Another motion was moved, but we have yet to dispense with mine.

[English]

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Gagnon, I was putting the two together. Mr. Martin had a concern that the Conservative Party would have two rounds of questioning before the NDP had one. I said let's just change the order so that the NDP has a round.

So we'll go with the seven minutes, if that's what is agreed to, and then the second round as laid out. There will be some time left. I would like, as chair, to allocate that time to whichever party is on a roll that day and that has really done its homework, or is really interested in the subject and has what I see as productive questioning going on. It would just allow me some leeway.

Is that agreed to? The clerk wants to get this clarified.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Can you please repeat the order in which the parties will be asking questions?

[English]

The Chair: The order would be Conservative, Bloc, Liberal, NDP, and Conservative in the first round, seven minutes each. The second round is as on the sheet there. Beyond that, the chair will allocate, depending on who seems to be really into the questioning. We can always adjust that.

Is this agreed to? No opposition?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Oh, we need a motion.

Mr. Gagnon, do you want to make that motion? We'd better have the motion before we have it agreed to.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: I move that [*Editor's note: inaudible*], a motion on which all members agreed.

[English]

The Chair: The clerk will keep me in line here, I'm sure. She'll try, anyway.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: The balance of the items, Mr. Chair, are straightforward and routine, so I would like to move all of the rest of the items from payment of witnesses right through to order in council appointments.

The Chair: Is that agreed to by the committee?

Ms. Thibault.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I understand my colleague who is concerned about the process being effective. Nevertheless, I'd like to move an amendment to the motion respecting the distribution of documents, namely that no witness document be distributed without the express authorization of the Clerk.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo: The authorization actually comes from the committee.

The Chair: My understanding is that what we have proposed here would accommodate that.

• (1120)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I don't see where it says that, Mr. Chairman, because the motion now on the table pertains to the distribution of documents and reads as follows: that the Clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute to members of the committee documents only when they exist in both official languages.

I propose the addition of the following words: "and that no witness document be distributed without the express authorization of the Clerk. In other words, when a witness arrives and hands out a few copies of his document, the Clerk will need to authorize that action in advance. That's the amendment I'm putting forward. Furthermore, documents that are distributed must be in both official languages. Obviously, I totally agree with that stipulation.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Moore.

Mr. James Moore: I think we can take the spirit of what our colleague has said, but I don't think we actually have to have it in a formal motion. I think we're all acting in good faith here. The clerk has heard the recommendation, and the chair understands it. I think the point has been made, and it's a fair point. I think that's good enough. As Mr. Szabo has noted, all of these motions are standard fare for all committees. But I do appreciate the sentiment of what was mentioned. The sentiment has been made and noted, and I think that should suffice.

The Chair: Ms. Thibault, I have discussed this with the clerk, and she assures me that when she invites witnesses, they are always instructed not to distribute any literature unless it is in both official languages.

Ms. Louise Thibault: I'm sure my colleague will understand me.

[Translation]

I'm stressing this point, Mr. Chairman, because I'm told this happened during the 37th Parliament. I'm not saying it happened in this committee in particular, but since my colleague says that we'll proceed in this manner, I see no problem spelling that out in the motion. Then, there won't be any misunderstanding. Everything will be quite clear.

Thank you.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: May I say something further?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: In order to satisfy the legitimate point raised by Ms. Thibault, in the final article on the first page it says "Distribution of documents with translation". We could add the word "only". If you make that read "only the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents and only when they exist in both official

languages", that might express the sentiment without needing a whole new motion.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Precisely. Since all documents will be submitted to the Clerk, the Clerk will be the only one authorized to distribute them.

[English]

The Chair: Is that okay?

[Translation]

The Clerk: Is everyone alright with that?

[English]

The Chair: Is it agreed?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: With that amendment, can we approve the rest of the motions on this page?

Madame Thibault.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I'd like to move that when a chapter of the Auditor General's Report covers a topic related to this committee's mandate, the committee invite the Office of the Auditor General and senior departmental officials to testify before the committee and that if possible, the meeting be televised.

• (1125)

[English]

The Chair: Would you like that as a separate motion?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Yes, please.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any discussion on that?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Are there any other motions?

Mr. Moore.

Mr. James Moore: I move that when the supplementary estimates are tabled in the House, the committee invite the minister or any relevant senior officials of a department to appear at a meeting of the committee, which is televised if possible.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Are there any other motions to bring before the committee? I do have a reason. I would like the committee to go in camera for a very short time to discuss possible business for next Tuesday.

Since there is no other business, I'll suspend for just a minute while the room is cleared. We'll come back and have a very short discussion on a possibility for next Tuesday.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le réseau électronique « Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire » à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.