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# **Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, February 3, 2009**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Bruce Stanton**

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## Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

Tuesday, February 3, 2009

• (0910)

[English]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Graeme Truelove):** Good morning, honourable members. Welcome to the second session of the 40th Parliament.

My name is Graeme Truelove. I'll be the clerk of the committee. Members who were with the committee last year might be interested to know that the previous clerk of the committee, Bonnie Charron, gave birth to a healthy seven-pound baby boy named Jack on September 28.

Seeing a quorum, we can now proceed to the election of the chair, and I'm ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Albrecht.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Clerk, I nominate Bruce Stanton.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Albrecht nominates Mr. Stanton.

Are there other motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried and Mr. Stanton the duly elected chair.

I am now prepared to accept motions for the position of vice-chair.

Mr. Bélanger.

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I would like to nominate my colleague Todd Russell.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Bélanger has nominated Mr. Russell.

[English]

Are there any other motions?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** Mr. Russell is elected vice-chair.

Are there motions for the position of second vice-chair?

Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** I would like to nominate Ms. Jean Crowder.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Lemay has nominated Ms. Crowder.

[English]

Are there other motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** Ms. Crowder is elected the second vice-chair.

I'll now invite Mr. Stanton to take the chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)):** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

First, I thank you for the confidence you've shown this morning in a very tough election, I must say. My congratulations to vice-chairs Mr. Russell and Madam Crowder.

Obviously we're hoping that we're going to have a very robust session in front of us. There's a lot of important work to do on this file for aboriginal affairs and northern development. As you can imagine, we'll likely see, and we've seen already, some legislation in front of us that the committee will need to consider in the months ahead. As we consider the topics before us, I know that we'll all dig in and do the very best we can to inform Parliament, and in turn the government, of course, on the best way forward.

It's a great honour to serve in the position of chair. I'll do my best to make sure that the committee functions well and with the utmost of decorum so that we can move the important topics of the day ahead in a respectful and conciliatory way and do some good work for the House. That is the key.

Regarding today's agenda, typically at the start of our committee session is the consideration of routine motions. I think the routine motions that were in use in the second session of the last Parliament have been circulated to all.

[Translation]

That's not the case?

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** No, they haven't been circulated. It wasn't possible to proceed before we elected the Chair.

• (0915)

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay.

I am at the discretion of the committee here as to how you would like to proceed forward. Would you like to begin with the routine motions that were in use in the last session? Okay, let's circulate those, and that will be our starting point.

Normally, committee members, when we consider the routine motions typically we proceed through them on a clause-by-clause basis. These, of course, become the operating rules for our committee. And of course the committees are quite able to set their own course in this regard, but we typically follow the protocols of the past as well.

**Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC):** Mr. Chair, may we have a short caucus? We have some thoughts here. We haven't seen this document, or we haven't studied this document enough to talk about it without a little five-minuter. Is that okay?

**The Chair:** I'm at the discretion of the committee. It doesn't matter.

Monsieur Lemay.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** With all due respect to my colleague, I would like to point out that the same procedural rules and routine motions used in the last session apply here. I've read them and they seem in order. I for one do not have a problem with this; we can break for five minutes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** As has been pointed out, this is essentially the same motion as in the last session.

Madame Crowder.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** And these were actually in the briefing book that was distributed to the committee in advance of the meeting.

**The Chair:** Yes.

Mr. Bagnell.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** In that there are some new members on the committee, I don't mind giving them five minutes to....

**The Chair:** If there is agreement, then, we'll just suspend temporarily and members can consider the routine motions and we'll reconvene in a few minutes.

Thank you.

• \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

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• (0920)

**The Chair:** I think we'll resume now that members have had a chance to consider the routine motions. As was pointed out by Ms. Crowder, these motions were in use in the 39th Parliament and did come out in the briefing package.

Monsieur Lemay.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Mr. Chair, first of all, I'd like to congratulate you. I would then like to move the adoption of the routine motions distributed to committee members.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Is there any discussion on the proposal to adopt the routine motions as presented?

Mr. Albrecht.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I would like to propose an amendment.

**The Chair:** Okay, proceed.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I propose, under the subcommittee on agenda and procedure, that we add to this list at least one government member, preferably the parliamentary secretary, who would have an inside knowledge of the government agenda.

Also, under reduced quorum, if a reduced quorum is allowed to have hearings and at least one opposition member needs to be present, then it would stand to reason that at least one government member should also be present. I think it's only reasonable.

I would move those two amendments.

• (0925)

**The Chair:** Okay.

To go back to your first amendment, with regard to the subcommittee on agenda procedure, what would it add, Mr. Albrecht?

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** It would add a member of the governing party, preferably parliamentary secretary.

**The Chair:** And you would propose to add that where? At the end of the clause?

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** At the end.

**The Chair:** You propose to add a government member; that's the proposal.

Any discussion?

Mr. Bagnell.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** I have no problem with that as long as the member is non-voting. We've had it in the past that the parliamentary secretary has come because they've had valuable information to add. As long as they're a non-voting member, I don't have a problem with that.

**An hon. member:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Madame Crowder.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

In the past, we've done on that subcommittee exactly as Mr. Bagnell has pointed out. The committee has been the four members as designated, and then the parliamentary secretary has often sat in to provide advice, but as a non-voting member.

I would support Mr. Bagnell's comment around the parliamentary secretary being a non-voting member.

**The Chair:** Mr. Duncan.

**Mr. John Duncan:** Just for clarification, is the chair a voting member?

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** The chair is a voting member, yes.

**The Chair:** Mr. Albrecht.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I just want to say, Mr. Chair, that generally speaking we expect our chairs to chair in a non-partisan and neutral way. It would seem to me that it would be wise to have the chair, even at the subcommittee level, continue to serve in that capacity and have the person who's representing the government to be the full voting member as opposed to the chair being the full voting member.

**The Chair:** So the way it has been proposed here, if I could just summarize the proposal, now with a subamendment by members present here, is that an additional government member is okay, but they would be a non-voting government member.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** It's not what's proposed, Mr. Chair. What I gather this proposes is that the subcommittee also include the parliamentary secretary in a non-voting capacity.

**The Chair:** Plus. So we would then basically have the chair, the two vice-chairs, a member from the other party, which would be the Bloc, an additional government member proposed from here, and the parliamentary secretary in a non-voting capacity.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** No. It would be as it is here, plus the parliamentary secretary in a non-voting capacity.

**The Chair:** That's it. Okay.

Is there agreement on this amended clause?

Mr. Duncan.

**Mr. John Duncan:** The way it reads, then, is that there's one vote out of four for the government. That's the way it sits, based on the way the discussion has gone from the opposite side.

I think it's pretty unbalanced....

**The Chair:** Just let him finish, please. We'll get to you in a second.

**Mr. John Duncan:** Either way, even if the government had two votes, it would still be outnumbered by the opposition, which is appropriate but more in keeping with the standings in the House.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Lemay.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Allow me to explain my position to the parliamentary secretary. I attended the meetings of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure last year and the subcommittee never held a vote. We always operated by consensus. If a vote is necessary, the matter is referred back to the main committee which ultimately has decision-making authority.

I for one enjoyed having the parliamentary secretary in attendance, because he served as a go-between between the government and the committee and let us know, for example, what we could expect from an upcoming bill. A good example of the benefits of his presence was that generally speaking, the committee would ask the parliamentary secretary about the minister's availability to testify.

I don't recall the subcommittee having to hold a vote. It always operated by consensus. That's why we liked to have the parliamentary secretary around, because he was not entitled to vote. If, for whatever reason, a vote was required, then the other four members voted.

• (0930)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Crowder.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Chair, last time around it didn't require an amendment. The parliamentary secretary often sat in on the subcommittee meetings without changing the structure that was in the routine motion. The parliamentary secretary would come and provide some background or whatever but was really there for advice on what was happening on the government's part. There was no need to change the routine motion. The subcommittee agreed that it was okay for the parliamentary secretary to sit in. It was more informal. I don't know why we would monkey around with something that was working quite well. Just leave it as it is without actually changing the formal routine motion. As it stands, it worked. Why would we fool around with it?

**The Chair:** We presently have in fact two proposals that have been put on the floor, one by government members and the other from Monsieur Bélanger, I think. I sense from the discussion that there isn't any more discussion on the first amendment, which proposed an additional government member, but is there any more on that particular amendment? We'll maybe ask the question on that and then move to the second suggestion.

Mr. Albrecht.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I think procedurally we're working on the subamendment that Mr. Bélanger presented, that the person be non-voting. I'm prepared to call the question.

**The Chair:** Okay. Is there any further discussion on the subamendment?

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** I didn't propose anything, Mr. Chairman. It was my colleague Mr. Bagnell.

**The Chair:** That's fine. It was Mr. Bagnell, then.

The subamendment was proposed by Mr. Bagnell to amend the amendment, presumably to remove the suggestion of "the government" and replace it with "a non-voting parliamentary secretary". Is there any more discussion on the subamendment?

(Subamendment agreed to)

**The Chair:** The paragraph on the subcommittee is therefore amended, and we'll make the addition of the parliamentary secretary in a non-voting capacity.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I think procedurally we need to go back to the amendment and adopt the amendment that I presented, to add a person. Right now we've just agreed that he be non-voting. Now we have to add the fact that we'll have the parliamentary secretary.

**The Chair:** Okay.

We've agreed on the subamendment. Now we go to the question of the amendment.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Let's be clear, Mr. Chairman. We're now accepting that the subcommittee include the PS in a non-voting capacity.

**The Chair:** Correct.

Committee members, if you'll indulge me here, and if I can go back, what I had read and what I understood in the subamendment from Mr. Bagnell was to amend the proposed amendment, in fact removing the addition of the government member and substituting it for a non-voting parliamentary secretary. Okay? That's the effect of the subamendment that we just decided.

So we basically, for all intents and purposes, by accepting that, have in fact taken it away and the committee has reached an agreement on that. It's a moot point to go back to the initial amendment.

I don't know, Mr. Clerk, whether we need to in fact ratify that question, but certainly the agreement has been reached by the committee to do so.

So I think we're agreed on the subcommittee question. However, Mr. Albrecht, you had a proposed amendment for a reduced quorum.

Is it acceptable to proceed to that proposed amendment and deal with that question?

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I just want to clarify that we're all agreed that the current subcommittee will include the parliamentary secretary in a non-voting capacity, because we haven't technically voted on that fact. But if we're agreed, then I'm okay.

**The Chair:** Well, do we want to vote on the amended motion?

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** No, I'm okay if everybody.... If we have it in writing that that's the agreement, I'm good.

**The Chair:** Yes, that's where we're at.

Now, you had another proposed amendment on the protocol regarding reduced quorum.

• (0935)

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I would actually add to the reduced quorum that one government member also be included for the purpose of holding a meeting where there is a reduced quorum. Otherwise, the government has no representation at all in these situations.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Can I just ask for a point of clarification?

**The Chair:** Yes, Ms. Crowder.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Given that the reduced quorum says that the chair be authorized, the chair is a government member.

**An hon. member:** Not always.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Well, at this committee the chair is a government member: Bruce Stanton belongs to the Conservative Party. So you already have a government member present, because it says that the chair be authorized to hold.... So I'm not sure why you need to add "government member" for this particular committee. I understand in other committees that the chairs are not always government members.

It's just a question.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Well, it is, and I suppose, Madam Crowder, it depends on what you consider the role of the chair to be in that regard, in line with Mr. Albrecht's comments. I mean, some might view that the chair really is there in a chairing capacity, not in a partisan capacity. It depends on your interpretation.

The proposal is to add that at least three members be present, including one member of the opposition and one member from the government. Is that correct?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** But my understand is that the meetings are at the call of the chair, and there is a provision, as we saw last time, where you could call extraordinary meetings. But if the meetings are at the call of the chair, then I would presume that the chair will do his work and make sure that his party members are going to be present before he calls the meeting.

Again, the chair is a government chair in this case, and although you're non-partisan in the chair, I presume you would do your due diligence and make sure that the government members were going to be present.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bélanger.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Chairman, if I'm not mistaken, and if you check the rules, if the vice-chair occupies the chair's position because the chair cannot be there, the vice-chair then is deemed to be the chair. It could be that you would have three members, including the chair, and that none of them are members of the government side. That is the way the rules function; that is my belief. You can have that verified by our clerk, and I would imagine the clerk would confirm that, I hope.

Therefore, I would support the intent here. That is, if indeed you have a reduced quorum.... My suggestion would be that it would be better if it were four, but I'm new to this committee, so I'll just let that hang. But in the spirit of fairness, it is acceptable to me, at least—and I haven't talked to my colleagues about this—that if you have a reduced quorum, and it stipulates that at least one member of the opposition, any of the opposition parties, be present, in fairness, it would make sense that it be stipulated as well that there be at least one member of the government. Now, whether it's three or four, I'll let that hang.

**The Chair:** Is there any other discussion on the proposed amendment?

Mr. Duncan and then Mr. Bagnell.

**Mr. John Duncan:** Just to add to Mauril's comments there, we were contemplating suggesting the number four. I think it's more appropriate as well, but we held back on doing that on the basis that we were already asking for some change. I do think that by adding the notation about a government member that we really do need to talk about four as being the quorum.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bagnell.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** I disagree with four, because there are times that come up when there's an esoteric witness that only a few people are interested in, and there's some other pressing business. These people come from a long distance across the country, so if you send them all the way back at a huge expense because there were only three of us here instead of four, I don't think that is necessarily the best way to go. It's on the record, and we can see what they said.

As opposed to the amendment, I tend to agree with Mauril, it seems fair. I'm just curious, from the clerk—or the Conservative members, if anyone knows—if there's any other committee that's made this change or if there's any reason not to make this change about having a government member as part of the quorum.

• (0940)

**The Chair:** I'm not sure what other committees are doing on this question.

Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Some do not know what a reduced quorum is and why we have this provision. In the case of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development — and we're not talking about referring this matter to the procedure committee and doing as other committees have — this provision is invoked when we travel to meet with witnesses. I'll give you a very specific example, namely our trips to Yellowknife when we wanted to keep costs in check. Again, I can give you the example of this particular committee. We've never had a problem with setting the quorum at three committee members because as a rule, the Chair travels with the committee. The English wording may appear somewhat different, but the motion in French reads as follows: *Que le président soit autorisé à tenir des séances pour entendre des témoignages et à les faire publier en l'absence de quorum, si au moins trois (3) membres sont présents, dont un membre de l'opposition.*

According to the French wording, tomorrow morning, three members of the Conservative Party and one Liberal Party representative could travel to Yellowknife to hear from a witness. We've never had a problem with this provision because quite often, we travel to parts of the country where it's not necessary to have 12 members come along. It's an expensive proposition to organize travel plans for 12 people in addition to all of the House staff. That's why we reduced the quorum to three committee members. In truth, the only reason for having a reduced quorum is so that we can hold committee meetings with the fewest possible number of people in order to keep costs to a minimum and to prevent situations where witnesses have travelled hundreds of kilometres to testify, only to go away disappointed because we didn't have a quorum.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Lévesque.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ):** If I translate this provision literally, it says that the Chair is authorized to act. We need to remember that the Chair is a government member. I think that if the Chair were to decide to hold a meeting with a reduced quorum, he was make sure that a government colleague was present if he could not attend. He is the one who decides. I don't think the Chair would be foolish enough to

allow the opposition parties to make the decisions. At the very least, he will make sure that a representative of his political party is present at the meeting.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** To that point, Monsieur Lemay makes the point that these reduced quorums are used as a tool when the committee is faced with the practicalities of hearing evidence that you may need to inform a question that's before the committee, or a study, so that you have the ability then to receive evidence when it's difficult to get all members present. That could be here or it could be, as Mr. Lemay pointed out, in different parts of the country. So there are some practical considerations here.

Have we heard all of the comments on this question? We kind of devolved from the notion of having a government member, and then we began to talk about yet a fourth member on the reduced quorum. Let's continue on the question of adding a government member here.

Mr. Bélanger.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** There are two questions that I would like to have answered, if possible, Mr. Chair.

First of all, does the Chair factor into the calculation of the quorum?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The answer to that question is yes, the chair is considered one of the members present.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Secondly, according to the rules of procedures of the House and of committees, is it possible for the chair of this committee to be occupied by someone other than a government member?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Therefore, what I was saying earlier holds. The same rule applies to all committees. It is acceptable to have a reduced quorum in order to hear from witnesses. The Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is not the only committee to operate with a reduced quorum. It's perfectly normal to have a reduced quorum. I will always defend the principle whereby the government cannot hear from witnesses unless an opposition party member is present.

The reverse is also true. I believe that it is important for a government member to be present when witnesses give testimony and that neither the government nor the opposition parties must conspire against one another. We are here to be fair.

In that spirit, I think it's normal for our rules to state that a reduced quorum—it matters not whether that quorum is set at three or four members—cannot hear testimony from witnesses unless someone from the opposition and a member of the government party are present.

● (0945)

[English]

**The Chair:** Is the committee ready for the question on this motion?

Mr. Bagnell.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell:** I just want to ask for clarification. If the chair is a government member and there are two other people at the meeting, then under the amendment that would be acceptable, right? The chair counts as a government member under your amendment.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bagnell asks a good question here. The practical way that this reduced quorum would work in its lowest sense, with three members present, is if the chair were there and were a government member, that would satisfy the requirement for a reduced quorum. If, on the other hand, for whatever reason, one of the vice-chairs were chairing the reduced quorum, then another government member would need to be present under the rules that have been suggested here.

Is that understood?

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** I have a further comment, Mr. Chairman.

I know my colleagues are concerned, because we have seen in the past that the government, in its infinite wisdom, can decide to boycott committees. That's probably in the playbook that you have received or will be receiving shortly.

Let me finish, Mr. Chairman.

If it is the government's wish to jam the work of this committee or of the government, it can do so, but I suspect that the public will have them wear it. So if that is the intent behind this motion, if it is not one of fairness, I expect it will boomerang and come back and haunt the government members who have put it forward. I'll make sure of that.

**The Chair:** All right.

Just to summarize before we ask the question, the proposal has been to add to the reduced quorum clause, to take the last phrase, "including one member of the opposition and one member of the government". Is that understood?

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

**The Chair:** Very good.

In terms of going through the remaining motions, it has been proposed that we adopt these. Are there any other proposed amendments to any of the clauses?

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** I move the adoption of all routine motions, as amended.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, we have the question on the floor.

Mr. Clarke.

**Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, CPC):** With regard to the speaking order here, just seeing the addition of another government committee member, I'd like to see the committee—with regard to the order of questioning in order to

give everyone the opportunity to ask a question if time permits during a committee session—add an extra government question at the end, if possible.

**The Chair:** The proposal is to add one additional slot for the government. Is there discussion?

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** No, no.

**An hon. member:** Is there a motion on the floor?

**The Chair:** Mr. Clarke has proposed that we add one additional slot for the government.

Just to clarify, Mr. Clarke, are you saying in the second and subsequent rounds?

**Mr. Rob Clarke:** In the final rounds, if time permits.

**The Chair:** In the second and subsequent rounds.

Is there further discussion?

(Motion negated)

**The Chair:** Are there any other proposals?

Okay, we're going to ask the question on the amended routine motions. Just to refresh your memory, the two amendments were on the subcommittee on agenda and procedure and on reduced quorum.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

● (0950)

**The Chair:** Good work.

For the benefit of the committee, before we carry on I have some points of clarification, particularly on the notice of motions. Just be aware, on the practice of the 48-hour rule as it relates to notices of motion, that what we normally work on here is kind of a two-sleep process. That's the way it works. You don't take the 48 hours literally. Essentially, if you're looking at having a notice of motion tabled for the Tuesday meeting, it would need to be received by the clerk no later than 5 p.m. on Friday. In the same vein, for the Thursday meeting you would need to have that notice of motion to the clerk by 5 p.m. on Tuesday. So that's the approach we would be taking.

Mr. Bélanger.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Chairman, with all due respect, I believe it's usually 6 p.m. It's 6 p.m. that is the standard House time for notices.

**The Chair:** That's the rule for the Journals Branch, as I understand it.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** It's 6 p.m. for the Thursday meeting and....

**The Chair:** It's 2 p.m. on Friday for the Tuesday meeting, and 6 p.m. on Tuesday for the Thursday meeting. Understood? *D'accord?*

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Mr. Chairman, if I may, I believe that it is 6 p.m. every day, except Friday. Correct?

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

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Thank you.



**The Chair:** Okay. So that is understood. We'll record that in the minutes that this will be the understanding, in case it comes up at a later date. So again, 2 p.m. on Friday for the Tuesday meeting; 6 p.m. on Tuesday for the notices of motion for the Thursday meeting.

Mr. Albrecht and then Madame Crowder.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Mr. Chair, maybe you had planned this later, but I just noticed that one of the routine motions we passed was to welcome our analysts who serve us. I think it goes without saying for all the committee members that we really appreciate the work of the Library of Parliament staff, who make our job so much easier. So I would just like to formally welcome them and thank them for all their work last year.

**The Chair:** Thanks for jumping the gun there. That's good. You see, we contemplate the right thing to do here at all times.

I'd like to welcome Mary Hurley and Marlissa Tiedemann, from the Library of Parliament, who will be serving our committee, as they do so splendidly for all of the committees of Parliament. Well done.

Madame Crowder, and then Mr. Bélanger.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Chairman, I know that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure obviously hasn't had time to meet, but I'm also aware of the ticking clock and the need to consider the estimates. I wonder if we could have some agreement to ask the minister to come before the committee, because I think it's February 12, or something like that, that the hope is to have those estimates tabled in the House. I think the committee would want to take a look at the estimates prior to that.

**The Chair:** Is it the committee's wish, then, to request the minister before the committee?

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** Invite the minister.

**The Chair:** Invite.

Mr. Duncan.

**Mr. John Duncan:** On that subject, February 12 is the correct date, which gives us precious little time.

Ministers are much more available on Thursdays than on Tuesdays. I know we're not scheduled to have a meeting on Thursday, but the minister would make himself available for an hour on Thursday morning. He has a slot.

**An hon. member:** One hour?

**An hon. member:** Two hours.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Mr. Chair...

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Just a moment.

Are you finished, Mr. Duncan?

**Mr. John Duncan:** My suggestion is that we schedule a meeting for Thursday and invite the minister and his officials.

• (0955)

**The Chair:** Okay, that's been proposed.

Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** Mr. Chair, the matter of the parliamentary secretary needs to be clarified. When the minister receives an invitation, he knows that our meetings last two hours. When he arrives here and stays for only one hour, that leads to some mild frustration among opposition and government members, and that frustration can quickly build to a crisis. The minister speaks for 20 minutes, or, at the very least, for 10 or 15 minutes. We barely have time for one round of questions and then the minister has to leave. Everyone is frustrated when that happens.

If the minister is invited here, he needs to know that our meetings last two hours and he needs to commit to two hours. That way, everyone has an opportunity to ask him questions. The same holds true for the deputy minister. They know the schedule when they receive an invitation from us.

I disagree with the minister spending only one hour with the committee. Frankly, I would prefer that he not come in that case, because we won't have time to put questions to him and everyone will be upset with him.

So then, could you let the minister know that when he accepts our invitation, he is committing himself to spending two hours with us?

[*English*]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** We'll summon him for two hours otherwise.

**The Chair:** The suggestion has been put that we invite Minister Strahl before the committee on Thursday morning for the consideration of the supplementary estimates, and that we proceed on that basis. The committee has requested the full two-hour meeting, which is the norm.

We hope the minister will give us that audience, and I'm sure there will be many good questions on the supplementary estimates that committee members may put.

Mr. Duncan.

**Mr. John Duncan:** I heard Mr. Lemay very clearly. However, I want to let you know that I sat on this committee for many years when I was in opposition, and I know how many times we tried to get a minister and couldn't get a minister. They found a way to avoid coming to committee. So I actually think it is quite enlightened that we are in a position where the minister has gone out of his way to offer to come before committee to meet our timeframe.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Monsieur Lemay.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Lemay:** The minister may only be here for an hour, but he will have to understand that committee members will be extremely frustrated. This is especially true in the case of the current minister, Mr. Strahl. I know that he likes to appear before the committee and I know you'll mention to him that we would like to keep him here for two hours, since we do have a number of questions for him. Of all the ministers, he is the one who has done his homework best so far. In fact, he has just tabled two bills and he will certainly need to explain them to us. So then, let's invite him initially to answer questions about the estimates, and then invite him back for one and a half, or two, hours to talk about bills C-5 and C-8.

Admittedly, ministers have not spent a lot of time testifying before the committee since 2004, but Mr. Strahl has gotten into the good habit of regularly spending up to two hours with us, and I'd like to see that continue.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Is there any other discussion?

We will make the invitation and express understanding that ministers' schedules are sometimes difficult. We appreciate the offer of the minister to come, and hope that he can stay as long as he is able in that first meeting on Thursday.

We had a question over here. Mr. Clarke.

**Mr. Rob Clarke:** You answered it.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Bélanger.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger:** On a matter of procedure, could we ask our clerk, for those of us who are new here, to make sure we have the names and coordinates of the parliamentary staff—his own, and perhaps everyone else's, all the members'—so that we can easily communicate with each other?

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** That's a good idea.

[*English*]

I think that's all.

For the subcommittee, we will endeavour to get a meeting before next Tuesday's meeting. Perhaps if you can hang back just for a minute before we get underway, we'll consider when that might be possible and consider our work plan.

If that's it, the meeting's adjourned. Thank you.

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