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Tuesday, March 9, 2010

—
Chair

Mr. Lee Richardson

Standing Committee on International Trade

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• (1535)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Jean-Marie David): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): I'd like to move that Mr. Lee Richardson be elected chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Julian that Mr. Lee Richardson be elected chair of the committee. Are there any further motions? Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Richardson the duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: We will now proceed to election of the first vice-chair. Are there any motions to that effect?

Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): I'd like to move that John Cannis be elected first vice-chair.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Moved by Mr. Silva that Mr. Cannis be elected first vice-chair.

[English]

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Cannis elected.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

The Clerk: I am now ready to receive nominations for the position of second vice-chair.

Are there any motions in this regard?

Mr. Guimond.

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): I nominate Mr. Laforest.

The Clerk: Moved by Mr. Guimond that Mr. Laforest be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any 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. Laforest duly elected as vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: I now invite Mr. Richardson to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Let me first thank Mr. Julian for his gracious nomination and also for hosting the after-party.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1540)

Mr. Peter Julian: Bread and water.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Free tofu all around.

The Chair: Free tofu? That's good, Scott.

We do have just a couple of minor things. Let's get them out of the way, and then we can decide whether or not we want to spend the rest of the afternoon here.

The first is the usual motion to pay the bills. I think everyone knows about this stuff.

On Wednesday, March 3, 2010, the House of Commons adopted the following order:

That, for all standing committees, routine motions in effect at the time of prorogation of the previous session be deemed to have been adopted in the current session, provided that committees be empowered to alter or rescind such motions as they deem appropriate.

Accordingly, the routine motions that were in effect at the time of prorogation are reinstated. The clerk will reflect the House order in the minutes of this meeting. The committee can, if it chooses, amend any of these motions.

Finally, for our purposes, the clerk has distributed a copy of all the motions to committee members.

So really, I guess you're going to save us some time, Mr. Clerk.

Does anybody have any changes to what we did last time? This is really just about paying the bills, the order of speaking and the length, and all those kinds of things.

Mr. Mario Silva: Do we need a motion to do it?

The Chair: Well, no, we don't have to if we're all in agreement, but I think if we're all in agreement we should so designate so that—

Mr. Mario Silva: Agreed.

The Chair: —we kind of stamp it for you.

How's that? Is that all right?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: *Merci.*

[*Inaudible—Editor*]...to make an announcement.

Mr. Cannis, go ahead.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and congratulations. I know that on our side we all look forward to working with you and our colleagues across the way.

Mr. Chairman, I want to take this opportunity to invite all on the committee, and our staff as well, to meet Ms. Adriana Mejia Hernández, foreign deputy minister, multilateral affairs, from Colombia, next Wednesday, March 17, at 12:30 p.m. She will be visiting us, and we're going to host a lunch in the parliamentary restaurant. As we move on the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, and given some of the concerns with respect to the human rights situation in Colombia, I thought there would be an opportunity with the vice-minister here for her to give us a 10-minute or 15-minute presentation over lunch. The floor, of course, will be open for any discussion as well.

I'm going to have my staff pass around an invitation indicating this. I would ask only for organizational purposes if we could coordinate this by Friday, or Monday at the latest, so that we can book this. Of course, I want to mention again that the staff are invited as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. John Cannis: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: I've had some casual conversations with some of you. Mr. Cannis and I have had a meeting, and I've met with the parliamentary secretary and some of our other colleagues with regard to where we proceed from here.

We do have a motion that's been proposed. That could be dealt with today or on Thursday. My inclination would be that, as soon as we can, we should get to a discussion of future business and where we're going to go.

We kind of ended up at a point where we had concluded much of what we had begun, other than bills that were expected to come before the committee. Obviously, the next thing of consequence that is up is Colombia. I presume that at some point it will come back to the committee. I think we probably will be getting a bill on Panama at some point, too. We've looked at that. Jordan will be coming back to the committee.

I don't expect that these will be particularly controversial, other than the fact that there are some ongoing concerns with Colombia. Hopefully, Mr. Cannis' lunch will resolve all of that, and we can get through the Colombia bill rather quickly when that happens.

In any event, it's going to be a while before we get Colombia back on this table. In the meantime, I'm open to suggestions. Those I have received so far seem to be in new directions. As for where the government might be considering going in the future, I think we had expressed an interest previously about the EU and proceeding further with consideration of that. I think India is also on the drawing board. Brazil seems to have slowed down a bit with regard to their interest in pursuing MERCOSUR, but in any event, that's not off the table for discussion by this committee.

Those are some of the suggestions. I'd like people to give more thought to general directions on where we'd like to go so that we can perhaps do at least an 11- or 10-week plan on Thursday. With regard to Thursday, I think that shouldn't take the whole meeting, and we could probably get under way with the discussion of the first agenda item. It may coincidentally work with Mr. Julian's motion.

Mr. Julian has offered a motion to do with Canada-U.S. matters. One of the thoughts we had talked about is a broader study by this committee, for the next two months anyway, and virtually an ongoing study, of Canada-U.S. relations, because this has been so critical and so pivotal to trade relations in Canada. It has also been suggested that we take advantage of our Washington opportunities—that is, by way of our travel vouchers—to visit as a committee at least once a year.

I think we were all in agreement that we had a very successful visit the last time around. With the help of the embassy, it was rather well structured, and I think we got a lot out of that meeting, but at the same time, I think it almost invited many more questions than we were able to get to.

But I think the primary interest is really in establishing and continuing to maintain the personal relationships between us, as elected representatives, and elected representatives in Congress in the United States. For that reason, those are the thoughts I've been having. I have had discussions with some of you on this. That would cause us to have this as an ongoing study when we're not debating or considering bills before the committee, and then, in the course of the next weeks, we might decide which future target we may want to pursue, whether it's the EU, or Brazil again, or India.

With those opening comments, I believe it's up to your judgment.

I should just say, Mr. Julian, that if you're anxious to get started on your motion, I'm happy to deal with it today, but I believe that for the discussion, it may be that we just want to perhaps introduce it or bring it in on Thursday rather than have an extended discussion today. I'm not sure that we're ready to make a decision on it today. I'll leave it to your judgment as to whether you want to bring it up today.

Before we get to that, are people generally in agreement with where I'm going?

•(1545)

Can I get your comments, John?

Mr. John Cannis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: I'm sorry, there's a speakers' list.

Mr. Silva, and then Mr. Cannis.

Mr. Mario Silva: It was good to have this analysis of what was done in the last session. In relation to the report that came out on improving trade and investment ties with Brazil, there was a series of recommendations made to the government. I was wondering if you, in your capacity as chair, could write and ask the minister for an update on those recommendations so that we can get something back from the government.

The Chair: Sure. I'd be happy to.

Thank you for that.

Mr. Cannis.

Mr. John Cannis: Thank you, Chair.

As I have in the past, and since you mentioned Europe, I'm going to throw in my two cents again. We have to look at Europe as we are embarking on a Canada-EU agreement. That partnership is continuously evolving. Therefore, I think it's incumbent upon us to ensure that we continuously stay on top of it. I've said before and I'll continue to say that we want, deserve, and should have our share of the pie. We can only attain that if we continue to keep up with a traditional market, a stable market, a growing market, and a market that is related to the founding of this nation as well in many ways, if I can throw that in, Mr. Chairman. It's a market, to some degree, to which we have not given the attention that I believe economically it deserves in Canada. Rumour has it that there will be a trade mission to Europe. I think it would be appropriate for committee members—maybe not all of us—to join it or to do something on our own. If we take the time to blink, I think we might miss out.

The last area, which I touched upon last time—and we did embark on it to some degree in the latter stages of a Liberal government—was the gulf region. We know they're going through some difficult times now, but Economics 101 has taught us that we have the ups and downs on the graph. I don't think it's a market we should neglect. We've all heard and read the news, but at some point in time these countries in the gulf region are going to turn around as well. Knowing that there are several Canadian entities there that have done very well, it's important that we as representatives be there to show them that we're there to support them and do what we can.

Thank you, sir.

•(1550)

The Chair: Mr. Brison.

Hon. Scott Brison: I have just a couple of points.

I agree broadly in terms of Europe and India, but I think we ought to be doing more as a committee in terms of China. There have been some important developments over the last year or so, particularly on the energy front. In December, China signed an agreement with the Obama administration to deepen their cooperation on carbon capture and storage. In Canada, in Saskatchewan in fact, we have the best

technology in the world and the most advanced research on carbon capture and storage.

The Chair: It's Alberta technology in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Scott Brison: The Saskatchewan people are doing more with it, I'd have to tell you.

If you look at China and the energy front, they have a rapacious need for resources and energy, but they also have become a leader in solar and wind. Soon, with this agreement between them and the U.S., they will displace the leadership position that we currently have on carbon capture and storage.

One of the things I'd like to do if we go to the U.S. is to organize and focus on bringing a group of congressmen and senators to Weyburn—and there are other examples in Canada—and play a very constructive role in raising the awareness of what we have in Canada in this area. I think we have a window of opportunity to make a big difference on that file. It's important, because the advantage we have right now is that 40% of the stored carbon in the world is sequestered in Weyburn. The U.S., as a government, has just put \$3 billion into CCS research, matched by \$7 billion from the private sector. China is throwing in a lot of money. I think we're going to lose our head start very quickly. That's a very targeted and focused area where I think the trade committee could make a difference, legislator to legislator.

In terms of Mr. Julian's motion, I don't think it is mutually exclusive from a broader focus on the ongoing Canada-U.S. basis. Regarding the “buy American” agreement, I think all of us as committee members have questions to ask, and it would be constructive for us to have a study on “buy American”. If Mr. Julian is presenting that motion, we can have that discussion at the time. I don't think there's any inconsistency with the committee studying “buy American” and at the same time doing more on Canada-U.S. relations.

Thank you.

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

Monsieur Laforest.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): It is my pleasure to join you and the Standing Committee on International Trade. I have previously sat on the Standing Committees on Finance and on Public Accounts.

First, as to Mr. Julian's motion, I have no objection to debating it as soon as he is ready, whether today or Thursday.

Then, I have a question. From what I hear and understand, the Standing Committee on International Trade does not operate with a steering committee. Is my understanding correct? There is no steering committee, and future business is arranged by all committee members, is that not so?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, we're very democratic here.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: I am not suggesting that other committees with a steering committee are not democratic. But I am in favour of what you are suggesting.

Without specifying exactly what the future work of the committee entails today, I feel first that it is important that Mr. Julian moves his motion .

Second, in terms of your suggestion to include doing more on all trade with the United States, I feel that it is really important to have a good understanding of the situation. I would not necessarily be against that.

As to the other suggestions, we can come back to them later.

• (1555)

[English]

The Chair: I wasn't asking for definitive judgments on those matters today. I just really want to put it in people's heads and get a consensus of whether we're going in the right direction.

I will say, before we move on, that should we proceed with a general Canada-U.S. trade discussion, it may make Mr. Julian's motion redundant or unnecessary. That just this moment occurred to me.

We'll carry on.

Mr. Keddy.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome back, to you, of course, Mr. Chairman, and to all my colleagues as well.

I have a couple of points on what Mr. Cannis has said, starting off, and on what Mr. Brison has said.

Before I get into that, maybe I'll deal with the "buy American" part of it. Perhaps we should look at it as a committee. We all have our four points that we can use for travel to the U.S. now. I think instead of doing that on an ad hoc basis, as a committee we should sit down and work out a policy among the parties whereby we say twice a year we're going to go to the U.S. We'll set that up so it works with their congressmen and their senators, and it works with their Congress, instead of just suddenly putting a motion forward. That would then leave us two more points for those emergency situations when we're all of sudden in a bilateral discussion that's not going well or the Americans have decided to put an embargo of some sort in place. I think it's something we should be doing routinely instead of on an ad hoc basis, and I'd be willing to engage in that conversation. I think it would make a lot of sense. They're our closest neighbours, our largest trading partners. It's a very important border. It's something that we should have been doing, probably, years ago, but it's something that we should talk about. So "buy American" would be the first thing.

The other issue is that we will have free trade agreements coming back to the House. The government business has to take precedence once it comes to committee, so that changes our schedule up as well. But at the end of the day, if we get Colombia back on the order sheet, we'll have Jordan on the order sheet, and we'll possibly have a couple of others there as well. During the process of continued

negotiations for a comprehensive agreement with the European nations, it would make a lot of sense, as Mr. Cannis has said, to engage in very thorough bilateral discussions with the European Union, which would include boards of trade here in Canada, and those would also possibly involve visiting the EU.

It's not that the rest of them, India, China, Russia, Brazil, are not important—we know they are—but we have only so much time and so many members. So I think if we can narrow our focus down a little bit, we'll all benefit.

The Chair: Before we continue, I just want to make a comment on Monsieur Laforest's comment with regard to a steering committee. We have been pretty informal about this because we weren't always able to include all the various points of view in a steering committee. With three on a committee and four parties, some were left out of those views, and sometimes it didn't work properly, or there wasn't the right balance. Again, we're starting a new year. I've always found it helpful to get it all out on the table and let people decide broadly whether or not... Those matters are usually discussed by subcommittees. It tends to take half the meeting every once in a while. Then we kind of understand how we got to where we are, and we do get a pretty good consensus.

I just wanted to put that back out there, and I thank you for raising it, Monsieur Laforest. If anybody has any other interest in that and wants to pursue having a subcommittee to meet outside, we're always open to that view. For the time being, I'd just as soon we did the first round anyway at the table to get a consensus.

We have Mr. Cannan, Mr. Holder, and Mr. Julian.

Mr. Cannan.

• (1600)

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations. Welcome back, everyone.

Without duplicating the previous comments, I just wanted to make a comment. I've been on the committee for I guess four years. We did study the Gulf Cooperation Council, the GCC, and we did visit Riyadh, Yemen—Yemen is outside of it—Abu Dhabi, and Dubai, so there was some work done about three and a half years ago by the committee. The report was presented, so some of that can be brought back if we want to go there.

I think Canada-U.S. is a good starting or jumping-off point. Mr. Brison and Mr. Trost are both in the Canada-U.S. interparliamentary association. Something we try to do is to bring some of the senators and congressmen to Alberta, to Fort McMurray, and I think it would be a good idea to come to Saskatchewan too. So that's something we could work on in conjunction with the Canada-U.S. committee.

There is another aspect of Asia. I was in Taiwan in January, and they're working with China on an economic cooperation framework agreement, so there are some strong ties between the two of those countries. They're expanding trade with the U.S., and Australia is really aggressive with their trade agreement, so we need to expand there. I think that's where we should focus after Canada-U.S. The Canada-EU agreement would be historic in the sense that this committee could work together towards that and pull it off. The Canada-U.S. NAFTA agreement has proven to be a success for Canadians for a number of years. I think we're going in the right direction.

I have just one question, Mr. Chair. Do you have any idea regarding the Colombia free trade agreement and what the timeline for it would be from its introduction in the House to the time it would come to the committee?

The Chair: We have a pretty good idea of that from the last time we tried. I can't imagine it would be any different this time. It will probably take a while. There may be other opinions around the table, but I assume it will be reintroduced. I think they may wish to repeat themselves, but if they don't, then we can get it done very quickly.

Mr. Ron Cannan: I think we've had pretty well every witness.

The Chair: I can't prejudge what the opposition parties may want to do on Colombia. If they want to take longer to discuss it, I guess that's their prerogative.

Mr. Ron Cannan: In the spirit of cooperation and oneness and the betterment of our economy, we all want to work together, so the sooner the better.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I certainly miss the love when Dick Harris isn't around, as does Mr. Julian.

My sense, and why I like the direction of this dialogue, is that it looks like there are three areas that we're focusing on. I think being proactive makes a ton of sense to me.

In the first instance, we all know that we have the free trade agreements coming back to committee ultimately, at some point. There'll be three of those. That will keep us relatively busy up to the summer period.

Second, I really appreciate the spirit of the U.S.-Canada... It's been said, with the United States being our major trading partner, as they always will be, that if we don't have that as a focus in the broadest context...

I mean, when we went down to Washington, we dealt with those four issues. We were very clear as to the areas we wanted to deal with. We were specific. I thought it was effective. I like that notion of the home-and-home series in the sense of going down to Washington and bringing the appropriate folks up here. From a proactive standpoint, that just makes a ton of sense to me. I don't think we can lose sight of the importance of maintaining our finger on what's going on in the States. There are always issues, and issues fluctuate at various levels.

So for us to have a really aggressive, proactive approach to the United States just makes a world of sense. Frankly, that would incorporate the motion by Mr. Julian, because I think that's one part of the broader context.

Actually, Peter, you helped me to think a bit more about that. It seemed to me that there were a number of issues we dealt with in this committee this last go. It isn't just one thing; it's many things. I hope we would want to look at it, as a group, in a broader context, not just one thing. By isolating, I think we lose the broader value of that dialogue.

The third point is that since the EU is a priority of this government, having that as a focus—John, you've made that point—it seems to me that we have to go, from a review standpoint, in a direction, at this stage, with this government, where it's looking to go. So I think EU makes a ton of sense.

Did I tell you how much I love Greece, John? Just an observation.

An hon. member: Greece is the word.

Mr. Ed Holder: That's a fairly fulsome agenda, sir, if we look at it on that basis. So I'm keen to have a very proactive approach to this.

• (1605)

The Chair: Well, that's interesting, and I'll be interested to hear Mr. Julian follow up. If we do decide that there is a consensus on proceeding with matters U.S., in the short term at least, and perhaps a visit to Washington in the next couple of months...

I like the idea of reciprocation, having people back. It may be that the west is a good place to be, to perhaps do a Weyburn, even Fort McMurray, run at the same time. It takes a bit of logistics, but it could be of interest to our neighbours.

If there is an interest in pursuing this, we could start Thursday. We would need to get some witnesses in. That's generally a good way to get things started, to have people come in and express their points of view rather than us just sitting around the table talking about it. We could start off with government procurement. If we want to do that on Thursday, we could start right in on the Canada-U.S. trade study.

Mr. Julian, being first in line here, has a topic that we might just lead with.

I'll put that to you, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I like almost everything I've heard coming from the other three corners of this table. I certainly agree with Mr. Brison that my motion doesn't preclude a broader study on Canada-U.S., as you're proposing, Mr. Chair.

The reason I'd like to move the motion forward today is that on Thursday I'll be doing critic-related work in Vancouver on the Paralympics. Next week I'll be doing trade-related work in South America. So I won't actually be at the next three meetings of the committee.

I'm hoping to raise it today, not for a long, drawn-out discussion, but if there's a consensus and everyone agrees to moving forward with the idea that this is part of a broader study on Canada-U.S., then—

The Chair: My sense is that there's already consensus. We have agreed that we want to do this. If you want to have a motion just to have a motion, I don't have any problem with that, but I don't think it's necessary. I think we've all agreed that we're going to go down this track.

Mr. Peter Julian: Well, that's great. I will move it, but I just want to make a few other comments regarding future work.

The Chair: Carry on.

Mr. Peter Julian: It is true that we have to prioritize what the House refers to us, and I think a number of parties around this table have flagged that Canada-Jordan would be a more effective use of parliamentary time if the objective of the government is to get a bill here to committee. Canada-Jordan would not require the same degree of debate in the House that other trade bills may. So assuming that, we could be discussing Canada-Jordan fairly shortly too.

Mr. Cannis mentioned Europe. He's very right on that: it is going to have to be on the radar screen. As for whether that's in the spring or the fall session, I guess it will be up to how quickly or slowly the negotiations progress.

Finally, I want to reiterate Mr. Brison's comment around China. I think it is certainly an important trade market that we have not discussed as a committee, certainly not in a long, long time and certainly not in any depth. So if it's something he is proposing as part of a longer-term study of a new and emerging market this year, I certainly would agree and I would support that.

The Chair: Okay. That's the end of my list of speakers for now. Mr. Julian did include his comments before moving his motion, so I'll quickly go to somebody else—no, I'm not going to do that.

Peter, I don't imagine there is going to be any debate, so if you want to move the motion, why don't we just get it done? At least we'll have accomplished something today.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay, I'll move it. I think everyone around the table agrees in one way or another.

The Chair: Well, that's fine. Maybe I could just suggest, to save time and continue in this spirit of cooperation, that you add "in the context of a broader Canada-U.S. trade discussion".

•(1610)

Mr. Peter Julian: Sure.

The Chair: Mr. Brison.

Hon. Scott Brison: I would like to propose a constructive amendment.

The Chair: Okay. Let's let him move the motion first, and then you can propose an amendment.

Mr. Peter Julian: I've moved it.

The Chair: Okay. The motion has been moved as circulated. Everybody has it in front of them. Is there any debate?

Mr. Brison.

Hon. Scott Brison: I'd like to propose a constructive amendment that the committee invite the Minister of International Trade to meet with the committee on this subject.

The Chair: That is accepted as a friendly and constructive amendment. We don't have to debate that amendment acceptance. That forms part of the motion. We are now discussing a motion that reads:

That the Committee hold hearings regarding the Canada-United States Agreement on Government Procurement, signed by the Canadian Government with the Obama Administration, and which came into force on February 16, 2010, and its impact on Canadian communities, businesses, and employment, and that the Committee invite the Minister of Trade to appear in this regard.

Does that sound pretty good?

Debate continues. I don't have anybody on the list of speakers. Are there any comments?

An hon. member: We all agree.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: The only comment I would have is that it's always up to the minister's schedule. It's very difficult—

The Chair: Well, that doesn't preclude us from inviting him, so that's fine.

I would like to add that we perhaps could have a preamble that says "in the context of further Canada-U.S. trade discussions", and then go with your motion and Mr. Brison's amendment. Is that okay?

Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate your having come back with that exact point, because I think there are broader issues, and this is one point among several. So unless we want to have a separate meeting just to talk about all the various things we want to talk about, I think a broader preamble would make me more comfortable with that motion. I'll take it in good faith that it would be set up accordingly.

The Chair: Yes, okay. I think we're on the same wavelength here.

Mr. Brison.

Hon. Scott Brison: Respectfully to my colleague and friend, Mr. Keddy, we all realize that it's subject to the minister's schedule, but a committee is a function of Parliament, and Parliament hasn't been taking up a lot of the minister's time over the last while. I just think it's very important to realize that we have a fiduciary responsibility as parliamentarians, which is quite separate from that of the executive branch of government and the cabinet. Both the government members and the opposition members share in a responsibility to hold the government to account.

So yes, I agree that it's obviously subject to the minister's schedule, but having served as a minister, I made appearing before committees a priority. That's something I think any minister of any government, regardless of party, ought to make a priority. That stands us in good stead with Canadians, who have chosen this Parliament.

An hon. member: Hear, hear!

The Chair: I'm sure you're an example of a minister we'd like to emulate.

Mr. Cannis.

Mr. John Cannis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In light of what was discussed, when I first heard my friend Mr. Keddy's comments I totally accepted, but it's an open-ended response and it's an open-ended timeframe. As I've stated here on the record before, we all appreciate the schedules of the ministers and so on, but I think it would be fair to all of us to maybe work within certain parameters, certain timeframes. As Mr. Brison said, what we're trying to accomplish vis-à-vis Canada-U.S. relations is very important. I, too, put that at the top of our priority list since they are our biggest trading partner. I'm not necessarily saying it has to be in one week or two weeks or three weeks, but I would certainly say, Mr. Chairman, that within a month and a half or two at the most, the minister should find some time to come before this committee.

• (1615)

The Chair: We don't need to presume what the minister's response may or may not be to an invitation that has yet to be extended. I think it's sufficient to say that the minister will come when he can come, should he be invited, but we won't know that until we extend the invitation. So I'm happy with it as is.

Do we have a reasonable preamble to this? Fine. It would be:

That in the context of a broader study of Canada/U.S. trade relations, the Committee hold hearings regarding the Canada/U.S. agreement on government procurement, signed by the Canadian government with the Obama Administration, and which came into force February 16, 2010, its impact on Canadian communities, businesses and employment, and that the committee invite the Minister of International Trade in this regard.

Mr. Keddy, do you have a final comment?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Just in line with the enlightenment offered by Mr. Brison and Mr. Cannis—and I appreciate their comments—I will reiterate what I said before, which is that there's a very heavy and busy trade schedule. The minister is travelling a lot. So, yes, I very much don't want to speak for him, and wouldn't, regarding a specific date.

The idea of the minister coming to the committee is great. I've sat on many committees over the years, and the only time you ever saw a minister was for your budgetary items, and most of the time they didn't come for that. So if we could get him, I think that would be to the benefit of all of us and that would work well.

The Chair: That's all very helpful, however hypothetical. We haven't as yet extended an invitation, so let's not be presumptuous either way.

That's all I have on the list. We have a motion in front of us. I think it's clear to everyone.

Monsieur Guimond, are you okay with your motion? You understand it?

Mr. Claude Guimond: Yes, this is good.

The Chair: There you go.

Mr. Silva is calling for the question. I think he has a pressing engagement.

Those in favour of the motion, please raise your hand. Any opposed?

It's unanimous then.

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

The Chair: Very good. We will begin on Thursday with consideration of this motion. In the meantime, if anybody has any quick suggestions for witnesses, we have to start someplace. It wouldn't surprise me if Mr. Julian had at least one witness up his sleeve, but I wonder if, in the interest of the committee and just general knowledge, we might ask the department for a briefing on the issue prior to commencement of the discussion.

So I would say that for the first meeting on Thursday, if we could do that, Mr. Clerk, we would extend an invitation to the department to provide a briefing on this matter. That would be at 3:30 on Thursday, and it would be followed by another witness, if we could get one on that short notice. I think Mr. Julian may have a suggestion.

Is everybody cool with that?

Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Sorry, just to clarify, for the agenda we'll stay on Canada and the U.S., then? Are we allocating how many we need?

The Chair: I think we're going to leave the broader discussion of Canada-U.S. trade relations as an open topic. We will continue to come back to that and engage our American colleagues.

We'll see how long this one takes. That'll be up to the committee. We don't want to presume anything of the committee.

Mr. Ron Cannan: He's going to be away for three weeks.

The Chair: Are you not going to be here on Thursday?

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm not here on Thursday, but Mr. Allen, who is very congenial and eloquent—

The Chair: Then I'm happy to... It's your motion.

Mr. Peter Julian: —and a much better choice.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Why don't we just discuss the timetable this Thursday?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Peter Julian: It doesn't make a difference. Mr. Allen is our representative for the next three meetings.

The Chair: It's your motion. If you would like us to hold off for a couple of weeks, that's fine with us. We can talk about future business.

• (1620)

Mr. Peter Julian: No.

The Chair: Well, let's have one meeting and see if we get through it on Thursday.

Scott, you seem puzzled.

Hon. Scott Brison: No.

The Chair: I think we are in agreement that we'll do that on Thursday. We'll have a brief time on Thursday to nail down some future business as well.

Thank you for attending. We'll see you at 3:30 on Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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