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Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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Thursday, March 11, 2010

—
Chair

Mr. James Bezan

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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•(1530)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Guyanne Desforges): 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.

[Translation]

Mr. Woodworth, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): I nominate Mr. James Bezan.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Woodworth that Mr. James Bezan be elected chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

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

I declare the motion carried and Mr. James Bezan duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Before inviting Mr. Bezan to take the chair, we will now proceed to the election of the vice-chairs.

I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

[Translation]

Mr. Trudeau, you have the floor.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): I would like to nominate Mr. David McGuinty.

[English]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Justin Trudeau that Mr. David McGuinty be elected as first vice-chair of the committee.

[Translation]

Are there any further motions?

[English]

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

I declare the motion carried and Mr. David McGuinty duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: I'm now prepared to receive motions for the second vice-chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): I nominate Mr. Bernard Bigras for second vice-chair.

The Clerk: Mr. Ouellet has moved that Mr. Bernard Bigras be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

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

I declare the motion carried and Mr. Bernard Bigras duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

I now invite Mr. Bezan to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)): Thanks a lot for the vote of confidence and returning me as your chair.

•(1535)

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Would you like your “chair medal”?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: It comes with props and everything.

I'm glad to be back. Everybody has in front of them the routine motions. As everybody is aware, back on Wednesday, March 3, 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, which 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 information purposes, the clerk has distributed a copy of the motions to all committee members.

That is in front of you. I believe it worked quite well in the last session.

Mr. Warawa, on the routine motions.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Chair, I'm not disputing that. I do have a question on the agenda for today. I see it's just for the election of the chair. In the interest of time, as there are some people who have a flight they need to catch, I'm wondering if the agenda is just the election of the chair today or if there would be time to offer the availability of the minister to come to committee next week. I can give specifics if you're interesting in hearing them.

The Chair: We do have routine motions. There were a couple of motions that were given sufficient notice that were circulated. They deal with agenda. We can either deal with them now or we can go to a steering committee and deal with them at the steering committee.

I understand some of us are flying out tonight. Maybe we could do that on Tuesday.

You said the minister may be available...?

Mr. Mark Warawa: I'll ask to have this passed out. It's a proposed agenda.

Again, now is probably not the time to discuss it, but—

The Chair: It's probably not the time, but—

Mr. Mark Warawa: I wanted to make the committee aware of the availability of the minister. I had originally thought it was going to be on the 23rd, but the only time on his schedule would be next Tuesday from five to six o'clock.

I propose that the steering committee decide what we're going to do on Tuesday, the 16th. We could still meet at 3:30 but end in time to reconvene the whole committee at five o'clock, and then the minister would be available for that one hour, from five to six, next Tuesday. That would hopefully give us enough time in the steering committee to come up with an agreed agenda that the clerk could then start working on.

That's the proposal.

The Chair: So members know the minister is available.

Let's first deal with what I have on the table, which is routine motions.

I'm not seeing any hands going up.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, can we propose that we simply adopt routine motions?

The Chair: Yes, and we don't even have to do that because it's already been done by the House, unanimously, by all parties.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Then that's fine.

The Chair: We're good?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, we'll continue on.

Mr. McGuinty.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): So the speaking order and rotation remain the same?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. David McGuinty: Thank you.

The Chair: Yes, everything stays the same. I think it worked quite well last time.

The only other thing is Mr. Warawa's suggestion. We'll deal with what Mr. Warawa said first, which is that the minister is available on Tuesday. In light of the fact that people have flights they want to catch, he's suggesting that we adjourn now and come back on Tuesday and deal with the motions, with the schedule. We could do it either as a steering committee or as a committee of the whole, to deal with the agenda.

Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Because one of the motions in particular does make reference to a desire to have the meetings with the minister televised, it would probably be nice if we at least talk about that motion.

I believe the other motions will probably be able to be dealt with rather quickly. If it looks like they're not going to be, I'd say we refer them over to a steering committee and we can discuss them another time. But if we can get them out of the way, it would be nice to start with just covering these motions and getting them done, if there's no discussion or not too much discussion around them.

● (1540)

The Chair: Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Chair, it's nice to see you again.

I think it would be appropriate that we deal with the motions that have been duly forwarded in the appropriate time, translated, and so forth.

This is the first that we've seen this. We've had no notice. After we do the other motions, I'm happy to proceed to reaching agreement on what we're going to do for priorities so we don't waste endless meetings again wrangling over that. But I'd prefer that that be more of an open discussion and that we don't just say yea or nay to what the parliamentary secretary has tabled before us.

The Chair: Mr. Bigras, and then Mr. Woodworth.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Chair, I tend to agree with Mr. Trudeau. It would be a good idea to settle the matter of the minister's appearance before the committee. We do have a motion to that effect.

I think that we can now agree, if the Parliamentary Secretary has no objections, to the meeting being telecast. I don't think this should present any problems. Later, I think we can have a full committee meeting to consider the rest of the matter.

It is always better to agree among ourselves before we move motions. We should strive to get along at the beginning of this session. If ever we cannot agree, then we will consider motions. But we should first resolve the matter of appearances before the committee and communicate to the full committee the questions on the three motions I have before me. This is what I would suggest.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

I just wanted to say really part of what Monsieur Bigras just said, which is that I think we have a steering committee in order to assist us in setting an agenda. It would be useful to have that committee meet and consider these motions as a whole, rather than trying to deal with them piecemeal, and then have that committee report back.

As to the question of televised hearings, I simply have no idea of what the minister's attitude about that would be or whether the parliamentary secretary is even able to comment on that today.

The Chair: Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: This is encouraging. We're off to a good start. I think there's consensus. We're fine with the meeting being televised.

So the recommendation is that we begin with a steering committee on Tuesday at 3:30 and then break and start the televised meeting with the minister at 5 o'clock, to run until 6 o'clock, for one hour next Tuesday. Hopefully we can come to a consensus on what we'll do with the agenda on Tuesday—

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Trudeau.

Just for clarification, Mr. Warawa, we're meeting on the supplementaries and the main estimates.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Yes. It's whatever you want to discuss.

The Chair: Mr. Trudeau.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Instead of talking around this, let's get back to the simple motion that was put forward on that.

The other issue is around scheduling. We have a time for meetings, 3:30 to 5:30, and it's awkward with flights and getting back home to the ridings on Thursday evenings. I understand that, but those are our times. I have to say, from just a quick conference with the three of us, that we're not available at 6 o'clock next Tuesday. We're sort of stuck right now. We have to leave at 5:30. There's going to be difficulty with that.

But rather than referring things to a steering committee, we're here in this meeting right now, so let's try to deal with these motions and get past them, particularly since on the first one, which we felt was the big one, with the minister appearing and being televised.... If we could dispense with that together right now, I think that would be a more efficient use of our time than talking about it some other time.

The Chair: I was going to suggest, just to make it plain in the records, that we put that motion on the floor.

Is there anybody else?

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you, Chair.

If David, Francis, and Justin are not able to be here after 5:30, I would be willing to be flexible with the order of the speakers, so that there would be an opportunity for them to ask questions if they have to leave early. The issue is that the minister is only available from 5 o'clock to 6 o'clock, so if some people had to leave that extra half-hour early, maybe we could be flexible on the order of the questioners.

If the minister is going to be speaking for about 10 minutes, then we'd have about 50 minutes' worth of questions. Anyway, we can

work with our colleagues here to make sure there's adequate time for questioning if they have to leave by 5:30, but that's the timeframe in which the minister is available. If you want to have access to him, it would be from 5 to 5:30 if you have to leave early. We may not have quorum, but we still would have enough that if other people wanted to ask questions between 5:30 and 6.... There won't be any decision-making power, but the committee could still ask the minister questions if they so wanted to.

Originally, Chair, we had made the minister available on March 23. That's too late. It has to be before that. That means Tuesday and Thursday of next week. The minister is not available on Thursday of next week, but he is from 5 o'clock to 6 o'clock on Tuesday, so that's when we're trying to make him available to the committee. He'd like to be able to come here if you would like him to come here.

As far as deciding the motions and the agenda is concerned, I would prefer that this be dealt with first at the steering committee, not here today right now.

• (1545)

The Chair: Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: I realize that the government is trying to show good faith, but we should consider that on Tuesdays, even after 5:30 p.m., it is rather busy in Parliament, since there could be a vote.

So what does this mean? It means that all the members will probably have to leave around 5:15 p.m. because the bells will ring, and the members will have to proceed to the House.

Extending committee meetings until 6 p.m. could pose a problem, in my opinion. In such situations, the minister will only have time to make a statement, and the opposition will not have time to ask proper questions.

I believe that we are setting a dangerous precedent by wanting to continue working after 5:30 p.m., especially considering the Tuesday parliamentary agenda.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Let's deal with the first.... I understand that there may be a difficulty.

Ms. Duncan, you had your hand up.

Ms. Linda Duncan: After you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Well, I was just going to suggest that maybe we pass Mr. McGuinty's first motion talking about the minister being here. Let's do this in a formal fashion. At least we can put this one to bed.

Mr. McGuinty, perhaps you would move that onto the floor about the Minister of the Environment coming to appear before committee.

Mr. David McGuinty: Absolutely. Thanks, Chair.

This is a very simple motion: That the committee immediately write to the Minister of the Environment to request that he appear before the committee on the estimates and the supplementary estimates and that those meetings be televised.

As I move this, I'd also like to ask a question of clarification or a point of order, Mr. Chair. The matter of inviting the minister to appear has to be passed by motion, I understand. The matter of having hearings televised must be passed by motion. Is that correct?

The Chair: For my purposes, I prefer to be directed by committee to get the meetings televised. I think the proper way to do that is through motions.

Mr. David McGuinty: All right. And that's why this motion has been brought.

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. David McGuinty: Going forward, then, Chair, just for clarification, if the minister were to appear again on other estimates or some other process, it would take another motion.

The Chair: You've covered off both the estimates and supplementary estimates on this one. You have those two covered off. I think it's fine.

The Clerk: It's good for the session.

Mr. David McGuinty: It's good for this session?

The Chair: Yes, because you're being generic.

Mr. David McGuinty: Right. If he were to appear more than once, then on each occasion it would be televised.

The Chair: As long as he's appearing on estimates and supplementary estimates, correct.

Mr. David McGuinty: Right. It would be televised as a matter of course through this motion?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. David McGuinty: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. So it's on the floor.

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Chair, I welcome the opportunity of having the minister here to outline the estimates. What I don't agree to is having the three Liberals speak. We always have the opportunity of somebody replacing us if we can't be here.

I think that's a little over the top.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Linda Duncan: If it's all the package, then I have no problem with that for timing, because who knows, as Monsieur Bigras said, what might happen by next Tuesday? I'm willing to accommodate in any way. Right now my schedule looks like it allows it, but we don't know what will happen with the vote.

So I'm fully in favour of that motion, but I am a bit concerned about the proposal of how we proceed.

• (1550)

The Chair: Okay.

Are there any other comments, or any discussion?

Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have checked the agenda and would like to remind you that the Bloc Québécois

opposition day will be next Tuesday and there will be a vote. The Liberal opposition day is Monday. Consequently, the vote will very likely be deferred until Tuesday. Therefore, there will be a vote and the bells will probably ring around 5:30 p.m. This is a very likely scenario.

Therefore, the government should take this information into consideration.

I am in favour of the Liberal Party's motion, provided an invitation is extended. We would like the committee to invite the Minister of the Environment in writing to appear before the committee on the subject of Estimates and Supplementary Estimates, and the resulting meetings to be telecast. We will make the necessary adjustments.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: A very quick comment, Chair.

We'll support the motion, the invitation to the minister to come to committee and that it be televised. We will support the motion.

The Chair: Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: It's sort of a point of order.

I would appreciate an explanation of why the deadline of the 23rd. We don't understand; where is this deadline of the 23rd coming from? Where's the mad rush that it must occur by that date?

The Chair: That's a deadline we have as a committee, assigned to us by the House to report back on supplemental (C)s.

Ms. Linda Duncan: On supplemental (C)s, but what about the remainder?

The Chair: On supplementary (C)s, if we don't have the minister appear between now and three days before March 23, which is March 20, then it's just deemed that we've accepted the supplementals without any questioning. That's on supplementary (C)s. We can still have the minister appear later on the main estimates. It's up to you if you want him here on the supplementary (C)s or if you want to hold off until he can get here on the main estimates.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I guess that's what I'm reading—

The Chair: To my understanding, he's prepared to appear now on both the mains and on the supplementaries.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Right, but if the circumstance occurs that we have to depart before we get a chance to even question him properly, I think it's important to reserve the opportunity to request that he come back so that we can have the thorough discussion that's merited on the mains. There is no deadline.

The Chair: Not yet.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Right.

The Chair: There will be once I get—

Ms. Linda Duncan: The 23rd is not the deadline.

The Chair: Mr. McGuinty.

Mr. David McGuinty: Mr. Chair, just moments ago the government House leader said in the House, if I recall, that the government's prorogation annulled 22 sitting days in the House of Commons. One of the problems we're facing now, as we bottleneck towards the work that's been presented by Mr. Warawa, or the motion that I presented...we're bottlenecked because 22 days of working time has evaporated.

We have until March 23. I can't recall how many sitting days that is. It's generous of the minister to offer us one hour between now and the 23rd. We are sitting next week, the constituency week, the March break week, our children's week, because the Prime Minister decided to have this House of Commons sit. So I'm asking the chair here, perhaps with a letter to the minister, to explore the possibility that we don't have to simply meet with the minister during normal sitting times of this committee. There are all kinds of flexible times in which the minister can join us. We have many days from now until the 23rd, and I'm sure the minister's schedule is not so busy that he can't give us more than one hour in the next....

By calculation, Mr. Chair, how many sitting days do we have until the 23rd?

The Chair: Six.

Mr. David McGuinty: We have six sitting days between now and the 23rd?

The Chair: Yes, not counting the 23rd.

Mr. David McGuinty: Okay. Perhaps in your letter you could express the situation with the committee for the minister. I'm sure the minister will want to accommodate this, and I suspect most of us would want to accommodate that flexibility here.

But as for Tuesday night, we know we have votes, Monday night we have votes, and I have another event at six o'clock sharp that has been booked for months, so I've got to be out of here probably at 5:20, Mr. Chair.

That's my suggestion. You may want to take that into consideration when you write to the minister going forward.

• (1555)

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Just in response to the 22 days, Parliament has agreed to work during 10 days, so that is 12 days and not 22 days.

Hopefully, every member of this committee used that time wisely and carefully and did not do anything in the way of political gamesmanship. I know I worked very hard during that time.

So as far as the motion being specific, an invitation to the minister, I'm supportive of that. As far as having it televised, I'm supportive of that. Then, through the clerk's office, we need to come up with a time

that works for all of us. If there's a possibility of being flexible, I'm sure the minister will make himself available.

The difficulty is I've seen his calendar; it's extremely busy, and it may be difficult to find a time before the 18th because of his availability. Maybe we're going to be looking at the 23rd. That may be the more practical time to get him here.

Anyway, I just put that before committee.

The Chair: We have a motion on the floor. Are there any more comments?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Chair, I would like to move that the remaining motions be dealt with at the steering committee on Tuesday, the 16th, including what I have passed out as a proposed agenda.

The Chair: So those motions that you're asking....

Since we didn't have them tabled it's not actually a dilatory motion, is it? Yes, it is a dilatory motion.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Chair?

The Chair: Yes? Did you actually move that onto the floor?

Mr. Mark Warawa: I moved a motion—

The Chair: That we postpone the consideration of these two motions until the next meeting.

Mr. Mark Warawa: That's correct.

The Chair: That is—

Mr. Mark Warawa: They're not motions that have been moved on the floor. They have been—

The Chair: Essentially you're looking to.... I'm actually going to rule that you can't speak right now, because you're changing the agenda, and postponing consideration of the question until a later date, which is what you're doing, is a dilatory motion and a non-debatable motion, and we have to vote on it.

Mr. Mark Warawa: That's correct.

The Chair: You're asking to set this off and then have us deal with this at the steering meeting on Tuesday.

Okay. There's a motion to postpone until Tuesday the rest of the questions on the agenda. All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Okay. They will be postponed until Tuesday. That motion carries.

With nothing else on the agenda, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Mark Warawa: So moved.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned. We're out of here.

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