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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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• (1310)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): We are back in business, folks.

We have the motion by Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Cullen, you have the floor. Did you—

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Yes. I appreciate Mr. Lukiwski's words earlier. I think Mr. Scott has some specific things to say to this.

Here's our concern specifically with what we've seen. I don't believe we have a date yet from the Prime Minister as to when the House will reconvene. The concern we have, if committee members remember the motion.... I'm not sure if we can make copies available from.... It was in our request for the meeting, if committee members want to refer to it.

The motion that we very specifically put forward in the spring talked explicitly about a number of things. One was potentially replacing the Board of Internal Economy, which is a complex matter. It's not a matter of a simple signature on a piece of paper. It also talked about conducting a brief study to bring us to that type of action and allow us the ability to have transparent and independent oversight of members of Parliament's spending.

The concern we have with both prorogation and how this meeting has come together is with any loss of momentum. One of the things we're asking of the government, and which Mr. Scott will speak to, is the reintroduction, word for word, of what we all agreed to unanimously just a few months ago. I think that's important—certainly from our perspective. As Mr. Lukiwski will remember well, we talked about this at great length before the end of last session, and got the agreement of all members of Parliament to change the way we do things for the better and that it go to this committee to do that work, with a deadline.

If prorogation lasts a number of weeks, or longer, that's the clock running on that deadline that we set for ourselves. That means the study will be less well done. There's a fear that the work will be of lower quality and that we might not get to the result that Canadians expect of us, which is to improve things.

That's the essence of bringing the committee back. Sunday afternoon is an interesting choice of time, but here we are. We understand that things are what they are.

I think we're going to potentially move, and maybe I'll pass to Mr. Scott here, an amendment to this to allow it greater specificity to

reduce the concerns we have about what Mr. Lukiwski has presented here today.

The Chair: Mr. Scott would like to be on the speaking list. We'll get him on there.

Mr. Lamoureux, you're next.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Thank you.

I actually appreciate the opportunity to come here today, as I suspect that a great deal of discussion has taken place in all of our ridings across the country, from coast to coast to coast, since Canadians are, in fact, quite concerned about what is taking place and what has been taking place in Ottawa over the last number of months.

In the past we attempted to deal with this, even prior to the House adjourning, or taking a recess, back in June. As members would know, it was the leader of the Liberal Party who brought forward four motions of substance. We attempted to get those passed. They are now referred to in the letter that Mr. Cullen has brought forward. I think it is important to note just how those motions, had they been passed, would have resolved a lot of concerns that many Canadians have today.

Unfortunately—and the record will show this—it was the New Democrats who actually prevented the motions from passing in the first place. So, on the one hand, we're glad to be here: we want to see changes. We want more transparency. We want those things, because we know that Canadians want them and are demanding them. We have seen strong leadership within our own party with regard to coming up with ideas on how we will be able to do just that.

I really believe that one of the first things we as a committee should do on this agenda—given the fact that back in June there appeared to be just a minority of New Democrats who were uncomfortable with the motions proposed by the Liberal Party—is to review those motions put forward by Mr. Trudeau and get the unanimous support of the committee. I think that would be a reasonable thing to ask. We've had the opportunity to review the motions. Everyone has had a copy of them, Mr. Chair. People are familiar with them. We would be doing a great service to Canadians if people would agree to let those motions pass.

Whether it passes unanimously today or not—and I will ask for that, Mr. Chair—as much as that would be great to see, I can tell you that we as a caucus are prepared to do it. We are committed, because we recognize what Canadians want us to do, and we're prepared to demonstrate that through leadership and to implement certain aspects of it ourselves. The question is to what degree other members are as well. I suspect that all members have had the opportunity to canvass their constituents and to find out that there should be support.

Mr. Chair, I'm not entirely sure of the proper procedure, but I am going to ask if you could canvass to see whether, in fact, there would be unanimous support for the four motions that were brought forward by Mr. Trudeau back on June 10.

I can quickly read them, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Trudeau moved: that the Board of Internal Economy begin posting the travel and hospitality expenses—

• (1315)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Reid, on a point of order.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Just on relevance, I appreciate that Mr. Lamoureux would be fully within his rights to introduce a motion or, indeed, several motions. I don't think there's a notice requirement under our committee's rules, but we are actually in the midst of discussing not merely another motion—and everything discussed must be germane to that motion—but an amendment to that motion. I would think that these remarks would be more appropriate when we've dealt essentially with this.

Let's deal with Mr. Cullen's amendment to Mr. Lukiwski's motion first.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reid. I was about to get there as Mr. Lamoureux was rounding the corner into new motions.

We are still on Mr. Lukiwski's notice of motion of today. Unless you are trying to move these as amendments to that, I don't see a way forward until after that discussion is complete. I'd be happy to come back to it at that time.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: With your assistance then, Mr. Chair, I would be interested in moving that as an amendment to the motion that Mr. Lukiwski has brought forward, if I can do that.

The Chair: Let's see how we get there.

We'll allow a little latitude today.

Mr. Lukiwski, go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): I'm not sure if this is a point of order or a point of clarification, but if you take a look at the motion we passed on June 18, paragraph (vi) says: examine the subject-matter of the motions, standing in the name of the Member for Papineau, placed on the Order Paper on June 10, 2013.

I think, Kevin, you are trying to reintroduce the same motions that we have agreed to study anyway. I don't see the necessity of that. Part of the House order, and part of the motion that was unanimously passed, was to study the motions that your leader brought forward. We have agreed to do that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I think a big part of it, Tom, is recognizing—which I wasn't too sure of in terms of the most

appropriate way of bringing it forward in the form of an amendment—that what we're looking for is just getting the recognition from all three political parties that these suggestions or motions that were brought forward back on June 10 are very tangible and whether in fact they're supported by all political parties.

Now, it might not necessarily be appropriate as an amendment. That's why I was looking to see if we could get the unanimous support of the committee to at least acknowledge their existence and in fact support them, because what we're talking about is not studying them per se, but rather adopting them.

The Chair: Well, I think this committee would like to usually move in that step, where we'll study before we come to the conclusion as to what we'll put in our final report.

I have Mr. Scott, Mr. Cullen, and then Mr. Lukiwski, but I'm trying not to get out of sync here as to where we are.

Mr. Lamoureux, as Mr. Lukiwski has pointed out, the subject matter you're talking about is already in the motion that founded the reason for our meeting. Belt and suspenders I understand, but I just don't understand why we need to go that deep at this moment, further —

• (1320)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It's redundant.

The Chair: If you'll allow me, let's leave it. If at the end you don't believe that the subject matter you're looking for is going to be covered, I might even give you some leeway to bring it back, but at this moment I think we're already discussing the topic that you're trying to put on the floor, either as an amendment to Mr. Lukiwski's motion or as another motion.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Okay. On that particular point, then, Mr. Chair, I appreciate your comments and I'll look forward to maybe a more appropriate time, when we could actually have some dialogue on the four motions that were brought forward by Mr. Trudeau.

The Chair: Well, we're instructed by the motion itself to have that dialogue before December 2, so I'm guessing that we will have it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes. I was hopeful that maybe we'd be able to draw some conclusions if possible, at least before the end of the day, so that we would have something tangible prior to the end of the meeting. I will hold off on providing more comments in regard to those particular motions, but suffice it to say that we're glad to be here today. We're anxious to see some movement in this area. We'll have to wait and see where it goes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski, we were still at your motion.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, and I guess my only comment.... I know that Craig is coming next, so I—

The Chair: I have him on my list.

So we'll let him do it at the end or...?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes.

All I was going to say in response to Kevin is that with all due respect, Kevin, I just think what you're attempting to do here is somewhat redundant, because it's in the motion that we passed unanimously to study all of the elements of your leader's motions of June 10. So I don't think we need an amendment or a clarification. It's in the House order that was discussed.

Eventually...and obviously I don't want to cut off any further discussion of my motion, but I would just reiterate that the commitment of our government is to honour the motion that was approved unanimously on June 18, and that is to conduct a full and thorough review of all issues dealing with transparency and accountability of members of Parliament. It's I think fairly clearly presented in the motion that was adopted where we're going to go with this. We're going to talk about things, about the Board of Internal Economy. We're going to talk to the Auditor General and other financial people. We're probably going to examine other jurisdictions. But the sole purpose of and the spirit behind this motion was to try to increase transparency and accountability. That's why my motion comes forward: just to reaffirm the fact that as a government we are absolutely committed to doing that.

With respect to one further comment that Nathan made as to honouring the deadline of December 2, as a committee—and everyone knows that we're the masters of our own fate—we can meet as often and as frequently as we want. We can have extended hours. We can meet evenings, on weekends, whatever. Our point is that we believe the December 2 deadline can and will be met, and we're fully committed to participating in a thorough review.

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski, thank you for that recap, but I'm wondering if you wanted to read your motion into the record, because it was done while we were in camera.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Sure. Everyone has notice of it and this is public, but I will read it just for the record:

That, the Committee hold meetings in the fall of 2013 pursuant to the House order of Tuesday, June 18, 2013, regarding the transparency and accountability of the House of Commons, and that the Committee show respect for the will of the House by allowing one Member who is not a member of a recognized party to participate in these hearings as a temporary, non-voting member of the Committee.

I know that other people are on the speaking list, but I would like to deal with the substance of this, and I would call the question at the first opportunity so we can vote on my motion.

The Chair: Super—as soon as we possibly can. But unless the people who are on the speaking list accept coming off it and voting, I don't see that....

Mr. Scott.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Great, thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think what I have to offer will actually assist in one respect: it will clarify to an extent a small concern about the extent to which we are committing in advance to move forward in the fall on the exact same motion adopted in the House on June 18. I think that's absolutely in the spirit of everything I've heard from Tom. I want to suggest an amendment that makes it even clearer.

In suggesting this amendment I think I'm probably helping on the point by Mr. Lamoureux as well, because my amendment makes it

exceptionally clear that in the motion of June 18, the provision “examine the subject-matter of the motions, standing in the name of the Member for Papineau, placed on the Order Paper on June 10, 2013” will be part of the study. This will be made even clearer by my amendment.

What I'd like to do now is just to read the amendment. Tom's motion would stand exactly as is, and then I would suggest simply adding these words:

and that the Committee further show respect for the will of the House by instructing the Chair of the Committee to write to the Government House Leader to request that he, on the first day of the return of the House, seek unanimous consent from the House to bring back the House order of June 18 2013, in the exact form adopted on that day.

I think this is a good idea procedurally, because we are going to have prorogation—it's almost certain—between now and when we'll be able to really study this. In that case I think it's really a good idea to have the exact same motion back before this committee, and the mechanism I'm suggesting here would accomplish that.

At the same time, it absolutely makes clear something that is possibly just a little bit too general in the first three lines of Mr. Lukiwski's motion. The first three lines talk about holding meetings pursuant to the House order regarding transparency and accountability, but then it says, “and that the Committee show respect for the will of the House”, and it only specifies paragraph (h). The idea of showing respect for the will of the House with respect to including a non-recognized party member is really important, but it's isolating one element of the motion, whereas the first three lines are quite general. All I am doing, I think, is crossing the t's and dotting the i's with what we've exactly heard already from Tom, that the government is in support of the motion as adopted.

I would like to add the extra procedural boost by asking you, the chair, to write to the House leader to ask him to seek unanimous consent when we return.

• (1325)

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, if we're going to turn, as I think we would have to do at this point, to debating a proposed amendment to the motion, I just want to confirm that Mr. Cullen never actually was going to introduce the motion, and that effectively this is the motion. Is that correct?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. That's the first thing.

Secondly, you talked about the first three lines, but it's actually added to the end of the motion. Is that correct, that the additional words are at the end?

Mr. Craig Scott: The additional words are in italics, added to the end of the motion. When I talk about the first three lines—

Mr. Scott Reid: I just had this handed out to me. I'm sorry.

Mr. Craig Scott: The first three lines reference was to how the first three lines are just a tiny bit too general.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. Now I understand. Thank you. That explains everything.

The Chair: Are you fine on that now?

Mr. Scott Reid: I am. Thank you.

The Chair: I have Mr. Cullen next, and then Mr. Lukiwski.

We are now speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's right.

This reiterates in black and white what Mr. Lukiwski just confirmed to the committee, the assurance that the government has maintained the political will over the summertime to continue the work that we unanimously agreed to in the spring. It provides specificity and assurance to Canadians that this work will continue.

I take the assurances from Tom just with regard to the committee's work. As soon as we get through this motion—I think we're almost there—I'd like to get into some of that discussion today so that the work can begin in advance on witness lists and whom we would call, with some suggestions made already, and the pace of work. As I've suggested already, while the goal is quite clear, getting there will be somewhat subtle and complex in changing the very, very old institution of Canada's Parliament, specifically the Board of Internal Economy, how to bring the Auditor General in properly, and those kinds of things.

This motion I think it just confirms the assurances that Mr. Lukiwski talked about. I think it should certainly confirm and give validation that the Liberals seem to be seeking. It allows the committee to know exactly what the work is about, and puts it in your hands, Mr. Chair, so that on day one the government House leader can introduce this. Of course, we will agree and we'll move forward, and the committee will have its marching orders to complete its work on that specified date.

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I just don't have a problem with this. As I said verbally, our commitment is to do it. I've said so in public now, and so if this committee wants to instruct you, as chair, to write a letter requesting that we reaffirm the motion we have already passed, we don't have a problem with that. We are fully committed to having the study.

The Chair: Super.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Can I ask a procedural question?

The Chair: Sure, but be very brief.

• (1330)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Just procedurally, I want to confirm technically that a prorogation of the House, which we have not had yet, would nullify the motion we passed in the House in the spring. Is that correct? I wonder if we can just—

The Chair: That would be correct.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, I think that's correct. I ask because people might be wondering why we have all of these assurances. That's because it doesn't exist. The moment the Prime Minister seeks prorogation from the Governor General, the motion we passed in the House in the spring won't exist, so this is a very public confirmation that even though technically that's procedurally true, when we come back we'll have exactly the same wording, in advance, already confirmed by this committee and others.

I just wanted to assure my colleagues and others of that.

The Chair: All right, I have no one else on the speaking list, so shall we call the vote on the amendment?

Some hon. members: Yes.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Fantastic. That accomplishes a good combination of motions today. Thank you very much. That's great.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: As I said in my very last comments, I wonder if the committee could seek to set a date by which we must submit our proposed witnesses. The reason I'm doing this, Chair, is that, as you know, for the people working on behalf of this committee, that can take a number of weeks with juggling schedules and what not. The uncertainty of when Parliament actually will resume is a challenge, so the second consideration I'd like us to interpose, unless the Prime Minister confirms quite soon when Parliament is meant to come back, is that we as a committee consider setting dates today regardless, because we do have the power outside of prorogation to set committee dates.

I'm not creating suspicions as much as addressing the reality that if the Prime Minister chooses the beginning of November as the best time for Parliament to reconvene, suddenly we're looking at a month with some witnesses with incredibly busy schedules. My concern is that we're going to run out of time and not do our proper work. So on those two fronts, would the committee consider setting a date today by which we should all submit our witnesses—and I suggest that date come quite soon, within a week or two—and begin to consider some potential dates for meetings, regardless of whether or not Parliament has resumed?

Those are the two questions I put to committee members.

The Chair: Your chair was going to suggest the first part of that today anyway, that we get started with collecting witness names. I'm not going to put a finite end to it, Mr. Cullen, because you've seen how this committee can work. One witness can give us an idea that leads to our talking to another. So rather than putting a hard lock on a witness list, let's start it today. If you have any, by all means let's start talking to the clerk and getting the witnesses forward. Of course, some are mentioned in the House motion: the Clerk, the Auditor General, and the chief of accounting. We'll certainly have to talk with them anyway.

I recognize that through the summer, knowing this motion was there, the analysts started some research on this project. We didn't leave it and assume we'd just wait until we got back. We've already started a lot of the research. I'm not prepared to talk about it yet, because it's not collected yet, but it has been happening.

That being said, Mr. Cullen, you also know that this committee is able to move large boulders uphill when it has to, and so I'm not worried about that finish date. If we have to, we'll get it done. We showed last year, given the redistribution, how we're able to finish on time and on schedule.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Chair, I also wouldn't mind testing the room as to the level of interest among committee members. I understand about setting the date and that we oftentimes have modified witness lists as we go along. I think there is something about a deadline though that helps everybody to focus their minds a bit. If teachers say, "Have your homework in at some point", they don't tend to be all that satisfied.

The Chair: That reminds me of the work this chair has had to do in the past—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm sure it does remind the chair—if the dog ate the homework. That's why I wouldn't mind just testing my colleagues in terms of those two things.

The Chair: I'm fine with having a small amount of discussion on this, but I'm caught by the procedures that this committee tends to follow on agenda and planning for future meetings, which take place in camera and not in public. So I ask the committee to take that into account as we have this discussion also, please.

I'm looking for other members to comment on what Mr. Cullen has said, or to agree to it.

Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I note that December 2 is the final date—
• (1335)

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: —that's being suggested. Nothing prevents us from actually reporting a little earlier than December 2, if this gets done.

I don't see anything wrong with our trying to organize meetings for this September going into October. I don't think we have to wait until we're back in session, necessarily. We are going to get prorogued by the looks of it.

I would be open to setting some actual dates if we could, Mr. Chair. I think there would be a great benefit for us in terms of a planning perspective and from a witness perspective. We're here to set an agenda. I'm prepared to open up the calendar and see if we can set some dates.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux.

I'll give a bit more of a comment at the end, but I'm not sure I'm quite able to set an agenda until I know what the workload looks like. That tends to be how this committee works.

Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: You've said what I was going to say. It's pretty difficult, if not outright impossible, to set an agenda until we find out how many witnesses people are suggesting we have. That's the way this committee has always worked. That's how every committee works. You get the witness list, and then the chair, with the support of the analysts and the clerk, tries to get a work schedule

based on how many witnesses we're going to have to hear from. I think that's the proper way to proceed here.

The Chair: Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I've only served on one committee, the immigration and citizenship committee. I know that when we set our agenda, Mr. Chair, what would often happen—not often, but always—was that there were government witnesses, official opposition witnesses, and third party witnesses, and it was determined in terms of what sort of numbers we were looking at.

This is the appropriate time and place for us to be able to talk about those numbers. That then allows you to get a sense of what sort of time is going to be required to do the review. I don't believe that we have to wait indefinitely for you as the chair or for the government to come back and say that we're going to have x number of witnesses. I think now is the most appropriate time to try to resolve that if we can.

How many government witnesses do you yourself expect to have, Tom?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I don't know until we.... I can't answer that, Kevin, because we haven't sat down to try to determine exactly where we want to go with this. Similarly, every time we've tried to set an agenda at this committee, we've handled ourselves in the same fashion. We have a week or whatever it is to come up with witness lists. You will be speaking with your staff, I'm sure, and with other members of your caucus, as will the NDP, as will we. We'll submit the lists, and only at that time will the chair and the clerk then be able to say okay, we have 20, 30, or 40 witnesses. Then they set a work-plan and an agenda based on that.

I think it's pretty presumptuous and very, very unwieldy to try to force a particular agenda without having seen what we're all suggesting in terms of the witnesses. That's all I'm saying. Plus, the fact is that we've already passed an amendment saying that we're going to reaffirm the motion as soon as Parliament resumes. As was mentioned—and I think both Craig and Nathan said it—with prorogation, the initial motion as unanimously agreed to on June 18 basically goes away, so we're going to reaffirm.... We're going to write a letter to the House leader to bring it back. Let's just do things in an orderly fashion. That's all I'm trying to suggest.

We want to get it done. We've all agreed upon that. We know that we want to have certain witnesses appear before the committee. Let's find out who they are and go from there.

The Chair: Mr. Scott.

Mr. Craig Scott: If I could, I'll cede this to Mr. Cullen.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: In that vein and on the orderly fashion, because I agree this thing could get unwieldy if you look at all seven proposals outlined here, what I would suggest to the committee is something specific, Chair, to allow this to be orderly and to allow us also to hit the ground running in whichever fashion, whether it's coming back early, as I've suggested, or not "early", but starting work when we're meant to, if we follow the parliamentary calendar, or early if the Prime Minister prorogues.

That is, I suggest that by this coming Friday we reconvene with a preliminary witness list, because five working days should give people enough time—if they haven't already started. We've started. In terms of what witnesses we're looking to have, some of them are obvious, but some other ones would cover that off. Secondly, I suggest that we have a preliminary set of themes to allow the analysts and the clerk to start to build that working schedule you need, so that when Parliament does get back, either at our own behest as a committee or as a normal function—as Parliament is sitting when the Prime Minister calls it—we have a work plan, we have witnesses set up, and certainly we have the first tranche of themes to be dealt with. By Friday, people should have a good sense of it.

We've been sitting with this issue for months—for some years—so it's not as if it's new. Maybe it is new to some parties, this idea of accountability and transparency, but as for the notion of who it is that we need to call and what expertise we need, I think it's pretty obvious.

That's what I've suggested. I've put that forward. I don't know if you need it in a formal motion, Mr. Chair, but that's my suggestion as an outline: that we return and meet with a set of preliminary witnesses and a set of themes that probably follow along the lines of the seven topics outlined here. There may be fewer or there may be more, but we can leave that to committee members to help decide. The committee can then send our analysts and clerks away and they would be able to build that kind of agenda so that we hit the ground in an orderly fashion, but also hit the ground running.

• (1340)

The Chair: I'll let you know that in the past and today it's always been your chair's thought to try to pre-think what you might ask and to move forward. We've been doing that. As I said, before we left for the summer we discussed what was in the motion and talked about what could be pre-done or at least looked at. I agree with you 100% on how great the staff is at anticipating our needs and moving forward, but I think without the steering committee actually doing this in the normal way we do it, we will try to do the schedule by whole committee and witness list selection by whole committee. I've seen how that's turned out, and you've been there.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You're saying the agenda should be set by a subcommittee?

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I totally agree. So amend my thinking, then, to a deadline with the subcommittee setting it up.

The Chair: At some point, once we have gathered some substantial part of witness lists, we'll move forward with a study of the plan, knowing what days we have going forward to look at it. I'm suggesting that we move in our normal fashion. That, I think, would work best.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Specifically then, because I talked about this Friday coming to give committee members and staff five days to gather those kinds of witnesses, my suggestion is that the subcommittee gather on Friday, pull those pieces together, start making those decisions, and outline the plan.

The Chair: I'm going to disagree with you, Mr. Cullen.

I'm not going to speak from the chair if there are hands up.

Mr. Lukiwski, go ahead.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'm just going to ask for some advice from the clerk regarding prorogation. Parliament originally was scheduled to resume September 16, so I assume this coming week the Prime Minister will make some announcement on that. Once that occurs, what is the status of those committees? I'd like some advice from the clerk.

The Chair: Go ahead.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Marie-France Renaud): Once the House has prorogued, PROC still has members, but we don't have a chair; we don't have any studies; we don't have anything, so we cannot meet. Even if we send out a notice of meeting, if there's a prorogation before Friday, it doesn't happen. So it's up to you, until we come back and elect a new chair—or the same chair.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Scott, I think I saw your hand.

Mr. Craig Scott: Just so everybody knows, that will mean that with prorogation, this is the one committee that continues a certain ghostly existence. We'll have members, but no body, if that's correct. So we can't actually meet if there's prorogation, and that would include the subcommittee. I understand that.

I guess I would suggest then, depending on whether or not we want to, in some kind of a provisional way, talk about the subcommittee meeting on Friday, that it could still stay open. I'll leave that discussion to go on. I just assume this would happen, but maybe we could make sure it would happen. Prorogation sort of gets rid of us, but it doesn't get rid of the staff, so as long as it's very clear that the staff can continue to do all the work they would normally do, then at least we know that time when we're not in Parliament is not being wasted. As long as that can be clear, I think that's a minimum.

The second point, while I have the floor, is just to make one comment on the agenda list. Point number (g)(iii) says, “study the practices of provincial and territorial legislatures, as well as other jurisdictions and Westminster-style Parliaments in order to compare and contrast their administrative oversight”. Personally I see that as almost the most important piece in all of this.

Having said that, I just want to go to a really minor logistical point, which is that we don't always do the best job in Parliament in general and maybe in this committee because of the room we're traditionally in. If we're going to have witnesses with that kind of expertise, some of them are going to be beamed in. Can we just make sure that we have absolutely the best technological set-up for that? Because we've struggled in the past.

The Chair: We'll see if we can get it. Some of these people will not come in person, as we've learned in the past, but—you're right—in our effort to do the best with—

•(1345)

Mr. Scott Reid: It's the room with the replicator.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Craig Scott: It's just a way of saying that there are better rooms than ours.

The Chair: You don't like our cozy little rooms.

The answer is yes, we can move forward. The other answer is that we exist only in kind of a name situation, but some of this work is already out there being done so that we can be as prepared as possible for the earliest possible date to start this study.

Mr. Cullen, on a very small point.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I would just express from the official opposition side, as New Democrats, that the urgency of this is very high for us. We'll be endeavouring to act under deadlines for ourselves in terms of witness list submission. I say this through you to the staff.

It is a real downside of prorogation...and I know there are many reasons that go into it, but one of the bad aspects is that work as important as this is, by my understanding of all the technical aspects, is delayed. If the Prime Minister prorogues this week, as Mr. Lukiwski and others have suggested is necessary, and if he wants not to convene and not to start work next week, then other than doing some of this advance legwork, it is delayed.

We are going to endeavour to meet that deadline. I would encourage my colleagues to also have that type of urgency, as well as in the submission of those themes. As Mr. Scott pointed out, and I think Mr. Reid across the way agreed, there will be some that have greater importance, or have greater impact on our work, than others. It would be good if committee members put their minds to that, to say that this aspect or that aspect has greater importance, to give guidance on where we put the preponderance of our weight and our work, and to reach out to those groups and individuals right now. Just because the Prime Minister shuts down Parliament doesn't mean we stop working; hence, this meeting today and the work that we want to get started on as soon as possible.

It is unfortunate that the committee exists only in a ghostly form for the next little while, because it would be great to start this work. We're very keen to do it.

That's it.

The Chair: Great.

I have no one else on my speakers list. We've accomplished what we needed to do to prepare ourselves for the fall and a new motion setting forward.... That's exactly what we'll do.

Is there anything else for the good of this committee today?

It's great to see you all on a Sunday afternoon.

We are adjourned.

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