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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): We're here today with Mr. Trost on his private member's bill. He's been here once before, but now he's come back. He has a short statement and you've all received some information from him on the next steps that he would like to see taken. We're going to let him speak to that shortly and then hear him answer some questions from members, and we'll move forward from there.

Mr. Trost, please, go ahead.

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all members of the committee for having me here today.

You've all seen my motion; you've all seen it put forward. What I thought I would do today, rather than argue basic, broad principles, is to give you a little insight on things that I think you should deal with in your report, that is, mechanics.

The general principle, the general idea, I think everyone can understand and argue about, but the report that you will have to do, based on the motion, has to address some of the mechanics of how this could be implemented if the House decided to adopt it in a subsequent Parliament.

Let me just run through some of the issues fairly quickly. You should have the memo in front of you that I wrote and sent to the committee last week. I'm just going to comment on a few things that I think should be covered in the report, mostly about the mechanics of implementing this.

Let me start with some issues that you'll have to deal with if this ever does become part of House of Commons procedures. Of interest to note is that they're doing the elections in Great Britain right now, and the nominations are all in. The foreign affairs committee there seems to be a very popular one to chair, whereas some of the regional committees like the Welsh committee, the Scottish committee, and the Northern Irish committee all seem to have natural candidates who are going to be acclaimed. Anyway, it's interesting that it's coincident with this.

Issue number one is the nomination of MPs for the election of chair and whether there should be supporting signatures. In the report committee members will have the option to say that they recommend yes or recommend no. I think it would be wise that there be supporting signatures. Thresholds can vary. Having five or ten would probably be appropriate, considering the size of our House of Commons. I think it would indicate that the member has support or

some degree of approval from colleagues. I think it would also sift out if candidates if members found fairly quickly that they were not getting signatures in support from fellow members. That might be an indication that perhaps they're not suited to the post they're thinking of.

Interestingly, in other places where they do this, they don't require signatures to be from both parties. I would not require that either, but it is something that you may want to debate or consider. Of course, there's always the possibility of letting members put forward their own name and going without any support. As I said, my recommendation is not to support that.

The second issue, and this one I really have no major opinion on, is who would run the nominations in subsequent election of chairs by the whole House. This is something that needs to be done; it could be by the Clerk of the House of Commons and associated staff there, or it could be by the Speaker's office. Frankly, I don't have a very strong opinion one way or the other. I think it would be something that when this were put to a vote [*Inaudible—Editor*] standing orders could be decided based on consultation with people with experience in both offices. Again, I think it's something that should be noted in the report, but I don't think there's something there that would be of major philosophical disagreement among members. It's more of a mechanical issue.

As for the timing of the elections of committee chair, I think there's a fairly natural window soon after the Speaker is elected. Members may want to seek the post of Speaker, as was the case the last time when Mr. Scheer won. If my memory serves me right, we had five or six candidates for the post. That should be done, and appropriate time should be given. As we've all had experience here, committees sometimes take longer to set up in some Parliaments than others, but a deadline, say, of three or four days after the election of the chair for members to have their nominations in, either to the Clerk or the Speaker's office, would probably be appropriate. Doing that a week later would be an appropriate time. Again, it's not a hill to die on, but it should be talked about and it should be noted that deadlines should be set, even if your report does not pick a particular timeline.

•(1105)

Another question would be how long do you have committee chairs elected for? I would say that when the House is prorogued, you can start again. For various sessions of Parliament you could have it. In this Parliament we've had two sessions, if I remember correctly. You would have two elections run twice. Again, that's an option you could have, but I think it's very possible people might want to switch chairmanships of committees. You may find that two years in, not every one has run their committee as well as, say, this chair has over the last few years, and there may need to be a re-election, and—how shall we put this—nomination races could start up again and there could be internal challenges based upon the competency of the chairmanship.

So that's another issue I think should be dealt with.

Another question is would we permit members to run for more than one post? Interestingly, looking through the British system, they don't have that, but it is an option that could be considered. Say we knew somebody who was particularly talented at both defence and foreign affairs issues, perhaps they would want to consider both positions. I personally would argue against that, but it's something, again, that should be considered. I think if a member is strong and competent in one area, he should put forward his arguments in that area, and again, if you had a second election two years later and the person wished to seek the post, it would not preclude that person from being elected in that second election after the House prorogued and restarted. Again, it's an issue that I think needs to be dealt with, and I think some flexibility could be put into that.

Another issue that I was asked about when I was here last time, which I'm a bit hesitant to include but I have included in case the committee does want to deal with it, is a question on the vice-chairs. I deliberately left the vice-chairs out of my motion because as a government member... By and large most of the chairs, with again I think four exceptions, come from the government side, and I didn't want to impose something on other parties. However, I do think that it would be wise for the first vice-chair, in particular, to be chosen. Again, that may be something you want to consider in your report. My advice, because it was not a major or explicit part of my motion, is that unless the committee has substantive agreement on that, I would leave it out. But if there is substantive agreement on that issue among committee members, perhaps you could include it.

I would say, however, as we've noted in many Parliaments, the third party, from whom the second vice-chair comes from, often has only one member, and if we adopt a position where all vice-chairs are to be picked, the party at that point would have absolutely no ability to pick its own member on a particular committee if the one and only position were handed out by a vote of the general House of Commons. That's why, if the concept of vice-chairs is discussed in this report, perhaps some note should be made that the first and second vice-chairs could be treated differently. Again, I would say to committee members that this was not dealt with in my motion. So unless there's substantive agreement, personally I would stay away from it.

Issue number five is what happens if the chair resigns or if committees have become dysfunctional—this has happened on

occasion—or motions of no confidence have been put, particularly in minority Parliaments—

The Chair: It happens daily around here.

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Chair, I sit on the natural resources committee. We have had to deal with Mr. Benoit frequently in private, so I understand what you're saying. For the record, that was a joke. I know the blues don't always reflect that, so I'd better put that out there.

The Chair: That might look bad in the Hansard. You'd better correct it.

Mr. Brad Trost: That was a joke, Mr. Chair. I have great respect for Mr. Benoit.

But that has happened, particularly in minority government situations where there has been the to and fro between the parties.

I think your report needs to deal with that, and the very basic questions of who would ultimately replace, and where would the decision be done? I could see a way of doing it where it would, first of all, be a vote of the committee, and then brought to the whole House for ratification. Or you may wish to go with the option of having the committee being able to remove a chair, and then the chair, if he wished to retain his post, could re-present their candidacy in the equivalent of a byelection. That needs to be dealt with.

People would have to think fairly long and hard if they voted out a chair in their committee and he then were re-elected by the entire House to come back and chair the committee, but this is something that needs to be dealt with.

We've had chairs resign to take private sector positions, so byelections will also be dealt with.

It's something that should be dealt with. My personal preference is that the committee could remove a chair and the House would not be required.... But if the chair wished to retain his position, I personally would permit him to run again, and if he received the full blessing of the House, he could come back.

Now, I could see an endless loop of a committee deposing chairs, and byelections being done, but I think sensible people would find some practical way to deal with what could be a theoretical problem.

That would be the fifth issue I would recommend we deal with.

If chairs want to switch committees, I would say you could deal with that in the same way as with a byelection. It's possible that two chairs could resign and both re-present for themselves. They would take the risk of possibly losing in an election in the broader House, but it's something that could be dealt with in your report.

On issue number seven, legislative special and joint committees, we have standing committees here. My idea was to deal with this with regard to standing committees. I don't have particularly strong preferences on these, other than to say that I really can't see a joint committee election being either necessary, or particularly of major import. The committees for the Library of Parliament and the scrutiny of regulations are the two joint committees, but I think it's something that should be thought of for the other committees. Again, I don't have a particularly strong preference one way or the other, but I think the committee should come to some sort of decision on that one.

If push came to shove, I think I would find it useful for both special and legislative committees to have their chairs and, possibly, vice-chairs elected. It would be a way of the House saying that it viewed these people as having specific expertise in this and that it would like them to lead the study of these matters.

I think my time is pretty close to being up. I thank you, and hopefully I can be of some assistance in answering questions.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Lukiwski, first. We'll do a seven-minute round, but let's be as tight as we can so we get as many questions in before Mr. Trost leaves at the top of the hour.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Trost, for being here.

Let me see if I can characterize this correctly.

You presented a number of scenarios that you're asking the committee to consider. With the odd exception you haven't really come down firmly in favour of one option or another. Would it be fair to characterize this by saying that really, you would be fine with whatever options in any scenarios that this committee determines to be appropriate, as long as the concept of electing chairs versus appointing chairs was approved?

Mr. Brad Trost: "Whatever" would be an incredibly broad term, but I'm mostly interested in having the underlying principle implemented.

The reason I've given flexibility and not really come down one way or the other is that this is a change that affects the entirety of the House of Commons. It affects future parties. We don't know which side of the House we're going to be sitting on, or even if we'll be here, as parties have vanished before. So I'm arguing that effectively we need to have fairly broad consensus to get this done. If every recommendation in your report is split on pure party-line votes, that weakens the report. That's why I'm giving a certain degree of latitude, a certain degree of flexibility.

The other thing is this: other countries—for example, Great Britain—have this, but Canada is a different country, a different Parliament, a different culture. We don't know precisely how this will work, so a bit of flexibility and input from many people would be useful.

There is a proverb that says that in the multitude of many counsellors, there is wisdom. That's why I'm not necessarily being aggressively prescriptive in dealing with some of these, in my view, technical issues.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Okay.

There's a technical issue, I guess, that you haven't addressed and that is fairly obvious to me. Should we go to this approach, how do you envision the selection of chairs if there are multiple candidates? Is it first past the post, 50% plus one, preferential...?

• (1115)

Mr. Brad Trost: My apologies, Mr. Chair. I must have skipped over that or missed it in my notes, because my original draft did have that.

I would suggest a preferential ballot very similar to what a lot of us are doing now in our nomination races. You have the candidates listed in alphabetical order, and then you number off your choices: one, two, three. It's a fairly simple system that I think most of us are familiar with.

The voting could all be done in one afternoon. I pity the people who would have to do the counting all afternoon, but they'd get it done and report to us by the next morning.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Okay.

You touched upon some of the options if an individual wants to run for the chairmanship of more than one committee. How do you envision the elections of these various committee chairs from a timing standpoint? For example, let's assume member X runs for chair of a specific committee and does not win. He or she then decides after the fact that they'd like to put their name up for consideration to be chair of another committee.

Do you see all committee chairs being up for ballot on the same day? Do you see a schedule of committee chairs to be selected over a period of time? How do you envision that?

Mr. Brad Trost: That is a very good question. As you heard in my presentation, my personal preference would be for all committee chairs to be elected on the same day. Effectively we would get handed a stack of ballots, and away we would go with the ballot boxes and vote.

However, if the committee is open to the idea, perhaps you could stagger it week after week. You could have perhaps the 10 most interesting committee chairmanships the first week, the next 10 the week after, and so forth. Or you could have eight, eight, and eight, because I think we have 24. There are all sorts of options for the committee.

In your first question you asked me if I'm mostly interested in the principle. The answer is yes. I'd be interested in and open to either solution.

My personal preference would be to vote for them all at once: you take your chance on what you want. I can see, though, that some members would be interested in having perhaps eight go in one round, eight go in another, and finally a few more in another round. That's an option too. If the committee can arrive at consensus one way or the other, I'd be fine with that.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Chair: Two minutes, three minutes...something like that.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: We can tell who's retiring.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I don't have to run for this position next time.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's right.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): You can do whatever you want.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Trost, I want to go back to a scenario that you brought forward that actually happened in this committee, I think eight years ago, with Chair Preston's predecessor, Mr. Goodyear. It was a minority government configuration—you identified that these possibilities can happen—where Mr. Goodyear was found to be lacking the confidence of the committee and was removed. Again, you talked about this but you didn't give a specific preference, and I'd like to get that from you.

If the House elects a chair but then the committee—let's say only five or six members—has the ability to remove the chair through a vote of non-confidence, what would you foresee then as being the appropriate resolution? Should it go back to the House? As you say, it could end up in an endless loop of the House voting someone in and the committee voting them out. How do you see a resolution to this? Should there be any finality? Should the House trump the committee's wishes, or should the committee be the master of its own mandate and have the ability to overturn the decision of the House?

Mr. Brad Trost: I would note that, number one, in a minority Parliament, where the opposition members would vote out a committee chair, they would also have the majority of the vote in the House. So unless it would be impossible for them to find another government member to run for it, they could basically choose who they would want for that chairmanship.

Now, it's very possible that the government caucus could sit together in complete solidarity and renominate their candidate. There could be a couple of solutions here. You could have the endless loop possibility, or you could have something where, if someone is deposed two or three times, they're just gone—the three-strikes-you're-out rule or some version of that.

I would be reluctant to ban whoever is deposed as committee chair from being able to run again, because sometimes after motions are passed or disputes have reached a certain point a resolution can be found. People may want to make their point and then be happy when they have the committee chair back. Sometimes they may not so much want to remove the chair as send a message, and the message might be sent. So it's possible that a recommendation could be that if a chair is deposed twice—just to pick an arbitrary number—or three times, he would not be able to stand for re-election.

If your report wanted to go into that sort of detail, I think it would be appropriate. Hopefully that situation would not arise, but a two- or three-strikes-you're-out rule could be a possibility.

• (1120)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Finally, Chair...?

The Chair: Sure. Go ahead for one more.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I just want to make sure that we have absolute clarity on this. If the committee decides to move forward on the principle of election of committee chairs, you would be comfortable with whatever else we come up with, or this committee would come up with, in terms of the process and the actual technical amendments if need be, as long as the principle is adhered to.

Mr. Brad Trost: Yes. If the principle is adhered to, I would be more interested in the committee having broader consensus on the mechanics than on any particular mechanics.

If you decide, based upon your previous question, to put in a rule that once a committee chair is deposed, he cannot run for re-election, I'd be fine with that. If you decide that he could run in endless loops of elections, I'd be fine with that. If you had a two-strikes rule and he would be out, I'd be fine with that, the same as I would be fine with it if you wanted to tier committee elections or have them all in one day.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Latendresse.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Trost, we will probably have a sense of déjà vu. I am going to ask you some questions that were raised last time you appeared, but I want to put them to you again because I think it's important to see what we can do to improve certain aspects of your proposal.

On our side, we work very hard to ensure that, to the extent possible, there is at least one woman and one francophone representative on each committee. Even if there are only three members per committee, we always try to maintain a diversified representation. I clearly represent francophones, women and youth, all at the same time, but it can work.

Do you think it's possible to improve representation, even with the system for electing committee chairs?

Mr. Brad Trost: Thank you.

[*English*]

As I noted last time when you asked this question, I asked what is the representative pool of current committee chairs. I forget, but there's either one or no female committee chairs. There's probably one, if my memory serves me correctly. Yes, I see a hand signal that there's one.

I would say that I am not comparing the ideal to my proposal. I am comparing current situation to my proposal for the election of chairs. I think that would be one of the things that would be improved or moved in that direction, because I could very easily see that appeal being made as one of the elements of someone's candidacy.

Let's be pretty blunt here. Members of Parliament want to be seen as reflective. They want to reach out. Caucuses do cultural outreach programs. They do gender outreach programs. They do regional outreach programs. If someone is making a campaign pitch and saying that they need to be there and chairing a committee because it's unrepresentative, knowing how members think, I think that would be fairly powerful.

I could see block votes. I could see female members crossing from one caucus to the other to vote for someone in another caucus because, frankly, they would feel that there's an under-representation of their gender among committee chairmanships. I actually think my proposal would probably open up those posts. I think it would aid that.

I think my proposal is not the question. My proposal is a partial solution.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: That's interesting.

I want to come back to an issue Mr. Lukiwski raised earlier. It is still important to try to plan what should be done. We talked earlier about decision making. We are starting with the premise that committees are always masters of their agenda and of what they want to do. I still have some reservations regarding the three-strike rule you proposed earlier. We need to find a process that would both help the committee maintain its independence and help the House make decisions.

How could we reconcile those two aspects if a committee chair elected by the whole House lost the committee's confidence?

• (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Trost: It's a difficult question, and that's why I put out various responses.

My observation of human behaviour, though, is that irrespective of what rules you make and what laws, someone will find a loophole and a way to bend it. In the end, what works the best is if people are actually cooperative.

As much as we have particularly aggressive fights in this place—I will have been a member of Parliament for 11 years by next week—my observation is that you're talking about a most extreme circumstance, a fairly rare circumstance. You might want to have a rule for that circumstance, but whatever you come up with is going to be a technical and imperfect solution. It's going to be imperfect because a situation like that is only going to arise when there are already bad feelings and resentment. So with whatever rule you come up with, whomever feels that the situation did not work out in their favour is going to resent it in the end.

You're not going to have a perfect answer to that one. I'm saying pick one solution, and then experience will guide us if we need to moderate it or change it.

Whatever rules you come up with this first time aren't going to fit everyone's wishes or everyone's desires perfectly, but we have to start somewhere.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: My last question is much more general.

What is the main advantage of your proposal compared with the current system? Is there a major problem with the current system you are trying to solve through that election? What is the proposal's main advantage?

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Trost: I think the main advantage of this proposal is that it starts to give the House and members a greater sense of ownership of the committees. Members do good work on their committees, but I think committees should be directly responsible to the House. Now, I would ultimately like a system where for committee chairs and vice-chairs, and even inside of caucuses, there is some election mechanism rather than the de facto appointment system that most caucuses now function under.

I think you would ultimately get more robust committee reports. I think you could get a broader range of subject matter dealt with. I think people would be slightly less cautious on all sides; I think that would sometimes be a good thing. That's what I would envision.

Does the system work poorly now? I would say no, but I said that systems can work better. Canadian democracy is a good system, but it's always what you're comparing it to. If we're comparing our parliamentary system to some tinpot dictatorship somewhere, of course it's perfect. If we're comparing it to an ideal that we all aspire to, then it has flaws. That's what I would say.

I want to get closer to the ideal. Canada is a great run country and has been since 1867, but we don't judge ourselves by world standards. We judge ourselves by our own standards, which is that we want to be the best in the world.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): First, Mr. Trost, I applaud you for your initiative. I think it's a wonderful initiative, something that I support—at least I support the principle of how we try to open up parliament to have this sort of a system. In principle, I think most Canadians would support that.

To further walk me through it, which you've already done to a certain degree, if I am someone who wants to chair a particular committee, you're suggesting that I would then be obligated to go out and get *x* number of signatures, whatever it might be. I would then be responsible for submitting my name some time shortly after the House resumes or predating when committees actually begin. Then it would be done on a preferential ballot where all members would in fact be able to vote. You're suggesting that the principle would just apply to the chairs, and nothing else at this point in time.

Is that a fair reflection of exactly what you're looking for?

• (1130)

Mr. Brad Trost: Yes, I think that would be a fair reflection.

As I've noted, I've touched on other issues. You may want to add vice-chairs, particularly first vice-chairs, to this, but I didn't put that in there.

Again, I view this as a very gradual step to show people that it could be done, and then we'll expand from there.

As I've noted, I would like to see broad consensus on recommendations because that strengthens it when it goes to a future House. With a future House, if we have a tightly divided parliament between the parties, if this is strongly identified with one party, the odds of it being successfully implemented drop dramatically.

That's why I'm fairly hesitant to be too aggressive on the details, because I'm looking for consensus.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Right.

In regard to the concerns about a majority versus a minority, do you see any scenarios where it could be somewhat problematic? What I'm thinking of is that today, for example, there are some standing committees that have an opposition member as a chair. In a solid majority situation, the opposition could lose that opportunity potentially to chair. I don't know if that's been the case in other Parliaments, in particular the British Parliament. Do you have any opinions or thoughts on that?

The opposite could be the case in a minority situation, where you could see a manipulation to shut out government members from being chair. Do you see that as problematic at all?

Mr. Brad Trost: Yes. If you review my testimony from the previous committee, I noted that I did not envision any changes in eligibility for who would run for chairs. That would mean that only government members would be eligible to run for what are now government-led standing committees, and opposition members would only be eligible for opposition-led standing committees.

Now, it's very possible.... One concern you were getting close to but didn't quite touch on is what would happen in a majority government when the opposition members' chairmanships could effectively be picked by the government members, or the reverse in a minority Parliament, where the opposition could gang up and effectively pick chairs from among those government members who are most friendly to the opposition. That's a possibility, but that would be the will of the House and not the will of the party leaders.

I would note, as implied in my statement on preferential ballots, that these votes would be secret. One thing I know about secret ballots around this place is that as much as the party leadership may have a preference, as soon as it's not holding up hands in the room, the votes are impossible to control. When they did this in the House of Commons in Great Britain, one of the candidates for one of the committee chairmanships noted that while they only have 650-odd members, among the candidates for committee chairmanship they had approaching 2,000 commitments. Politicians sometimes tell people what they want to hear, including other politicians.

I think a secret ballot would be very difficult for the leadership to try to manipulate, to try to cherry-pick opposition members, particularly in the new Parliament when you have new MPs and you have people who are manoeuvring back and forth. I think it's a theoretical problem. I don't think it would be a practical problem.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: In regard to things such as the special committees, the idea there is that if the Prime Minister at the time calls upon a special committee to look at something, you made reference in the report that it be of the same structure. You then

suggest that the same principle would apply, that the entire House would have to vote on the chair of that particular committee.

Mr. Brad Trost: Well, think about this. Let's say there's a Liberal government—you'd naturally like the thought of that—and there was some issue on human rights to be dealt with. Mr. Cotler in your caucus has a specific expertise, and assuming he's not a minister in the government, I could see someone like that wanting to lead the study because of his expertise and the respect he has on this issue from different sides of the House. Mr. Rajotte's retiring. He's well respected on the finance committee. A similar situation would occur if there were a particular piece of legislation or issue that had to do with economic or financial matters. It could be very possible that the House would want to give its blessing to members who have specific expertise.

Again, it's something you could address, and you could come down on either side, but I think it would add to the credibility of a committee to do that.

● (1135)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: The idea of having to have the secret ballot, that principle would apply even for the special committees.

Mr. Brad Trost: Secret ballots do a wonderful thing, as I noted in my remarks about 2,000 commitments from 650 members of Parliament. People are free at that point to do what they want, and I think it would add a degree of credibility. We want to have as much credibility in our committees and in the work that we have here as possible. Voters want us to have input and the credibility that we have goes a long way. The credibility that we're able to bring to our constituents, some of it could come from the committee here.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Generally speaking, currently in all committees there is a government chair, an official opposition vice-chair, and the second vice-chair is from the third party. Would you still want to see that principle, where all three political parties hold some form of position, whether it's chair, vice-chair, or second vice-chair?

Mr. Brad Trost: Yes, again I didn't address eligibility for positions. You must have that, and I think that's one of the things that would strengthen it, because it would not just be government members who would be elected, but also opposition members.

Again, I can understand the situation where a party only has one member on the committee, such as the situation here, and they could not put their chosen critic on the committee, if the House voted one way or the other. So I could see an exception being made for the second vice-chair position for parties with only one member, but other than that, I think it would add credibility in all situations, because we represent all parties here and all parties should function under the same rules.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Reid for four minutes, please.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you.

The two issues I see as being fundamentally problematic, not necessarily fatal, but being a problem that we would want to wrestle with are, number one, the issue of parties or factions in the House, and number two, the problem of having more than one mandate.

With regard to the problem of members of parties or factions in the House, if you have a system that we had simply set this up within and have no regard of the rules, no reflection of the rules, of the reality that a number of parties have their own discipline and are patrolling themselves as blocs, then the danger you have is that all positions will wind up being held by the party with the largest faction, particularly when that party has a majority—more than 50% of the seats. I'm certain that's the reason why the rules now talk about opposition-shared committees, the need to have opposition members present on committees before you can conduct business, and so on.

Once you reflect those factions, you then have the unintended consequence—I think it's unintended—of freezing out independent MPs, something that occurs in committees right now. I think that's potentially a problem, one that you may or may not have thought of ways of dealing with.

The second issue relates to having more than one mandate. By that I mean that you get elected by the House, you get dismissed by members of the committee, who had no confidence in you, and then under your suggestion, as I understand it, you could run again and be re-elected by the House. At first I thought this seems crazy, and then I thought maybe it's not so crazy. Maybe effectively it should be thought of this way. The committee submits an advisory opinion to the House that it doesn't have confidence in our chair. Then the House could say that it has confidence in the chair, so that the committee should conform. They may not say that, but if they override the committee's opinion, then, effectively, members of the committee ought to accept the chair's style of chairing things, or perhaps retire from the committee and let themselves be replaced.

I appreciate your thoughts on both of those two topics in the remaining time we have.

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Lamoureux was getting to your first point in his question too. Perhaps I should have been more explicit this time, but in the last committee appearance I dealt with the question directly.

In my proposal, I would argue that the eligibility of those eligible to run for particular posts would not change. For the committees that are designated government committees, it would mean that only government members could run for those positions. For the committees that are designated opposition-chaired committees, only opposition members could do that. Eligibility would not change. You would still not have cabinet ministers running for committee chairmanships and various other things.

In that respect, I think it deals with the issue you're dealing with. Yes, if government members ganged up and liked a particular opposition member, they could all vote for that opposition member, and that opposition member could end up as the chair even though most of the opposition members preferred someone else to be the chair.

But again, as I said to Mr. Lamoureux, that's easier said than done in a secret ballot. Having watched how many rounds the election of the Speaker went last time, where people's various votes were going back and forth, it's fairly difficult to do. It's not impossible. You could have the 20 government members most friendly to the opposition all elected as chairs if the opposition supported them in a minority situation. Again, that's possible.

The British experience, as I've been able to look through it, doesn't seem to support that this is what happens. In some of the recommendations and reports on it, they've said that this has been a profound change and that it's worked fairly well for them. What seems to be the case—I don't have a hard quote to back this up, but I wish I did—is that the people being elected as chairs in Great Britain tend to have expertise in certain areas or who have reputations. That tends to be where Parliament has gone rather than the top trying to manipulate.

The dual mandate question, I agree with you, is one of the more difficult ones. That's why I dealt with it with the potential three strikes and you're out rule, or come back and forth.... Again, there are different forms of punishment when someone misbehaves. My parents were not fond of sending me to a corner. They tended to prefer corporal discipline. But sometimes when someone misbehaves, you might want to send them over to a corner for a time out, for a quiet time. You don't necessarily want to kick them out of your house and expel them.

I think it's also possible that once a committee chair is removed, some steam would be let off, and the committee would be fine with letting him back. Again, we've had this problem in the past. You could have a situation where a committee could repeatedly fire a chair and he could get repeatedly reappointed by his party. We could have the potential for the endless loop in this situation too. It's not a new problem. It's just a different way of dealing with the problem, and it would be more public when it happens.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Lukiwski for four minutes,

Then, if you don't mind, your chair has a few questions today.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thanks very much, Chair.

You touched on a lot of the possibilities for how one could manipulate the results, and it's true. It may not be easy, but it's certainly possible.

One of the difficulties I have is the practical one of having members elect committee chairs early on in the process. For example, in this next Parliament, I think it's very likely we will have at least 100 new members in this Parliament. There are 30 new seats. There are 40 retirees. A 10% turnover of incumbents running again I think is normal, so we'll say that there will be 100-plus new members coming into Parliament for the first time without knowing the background or the expertise of anyone else.

They're brand new. They're newbies, whereas the whips of each party, or at least the party leadership, do know the background and the relative strengths and weaknesses of other members. One could certainly argue that the whips or the parties themselves are far better positioned to suggest which members might have a certain expertise to effectively chair a committee, as opposed to brand new members saying they have no idea who the person is. How do you envision overcoming that? Would there be speeches? Would there be campaign brochures put out? How does a—

The Chair: Hospitality suites.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: How does a new member learn about somebody who may be on a ballot to be elected or may at least be in a position to be elected committee chair?

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Chair, I'm sure the new members would adore hospitality suites, but I'm not sure that would necessarily be a positive thing for the "good governance and greater responsibility" pitch I'm making here.

I would address that, Mr. Lukiwski, in this way. It's one of the reasons I support members of Parliament putting their signatures behind candidates, whether five or ten of them. If not all then effectively all new members of Parliament will know sitting members of Parliament by reputation. You may not know all the members of Parliament by reputation, but if you're politically active in your party, you'll know four or five MPs by reputation.

Before I got elected, I knew who Mr. Gerry Ritz from Saskatchewan was, and I knew who Mr. David Anderson was. I know who they were; I was an activist in the party. If I was a newly elected member and their signature was behind someone's name, that would be an indication to me that the person was a substantive person, particularly for agriculture, for example, because I viewed them as people who were knowledgeable in agriculture and who had a degree of expertise in that.

I would say that probably your most effective campaign tool would be the reputational support that other members of Parliament would be loaning you. I would say you could do whatever you wanted for a campaign. I don't see brochures. I could see emails and personal conversations, and I could see people recruiting four or five of their close colleagues in caucus to do that. That's the way I think it could be done.

I think new members of Parliament could also gather together and try to choose a rookie MP. There was a question about how we do things. If you're a member of the rookie class that's getting together and you have some ambition, which a few politicians have been known to have, you could gather the rookies and say, "Hey, we need one or two rookies to chair committees. Here's my resumé. We, as the rookies, should stick together".

There are all sorts of ways to go about this. Since Parliament usually takes several weeks to a couple of months to resume, there would be time to organize this.

With regard to the remark that the whips will necessarily know more about who should chair than members of Parliament, I think that's a debate about the principle of this, and not so much about the mechanics, and I would argue that it might not necessarily be true. If five or six MPs with solid reputations are willing to put their name behind you for a committee chair, rather than just one whip who may or may not know you quite as well doing so, I think that's a powerful endorsement. I think that's a matter of opinion and it's not one I necessarily share.

One of the reasons I put this forward is that I think a broad endorsement and a broad number of opinions on someone's reputation and their skills provide for better judgment than does having one individual choosing.

●(1145)

The Chair: Mr. Richards, you wanted four minutes, and you may have it.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): I may not need it all.

I'm still left a little unclear. You've been asked a couple of times and I know you mentioned in your opening remarks the idea of someone potentially wanting to put their name forward for more than one committee, or that maybe they've chosen one committee as their first preference and maybe want a back-up committee if they aren't elected for the first committee.

You've indicated that your first preference would be for them all to be chosen at once on the same day even if you had some flexibility in your mind as to how that might be done. You were sort of saying that the committee could choose another method of doing it over a series of days, etc.

I'm still a little unclear as to your thoughts on whether someone could run for more than one committee.

Mr. Brad Trost: My first preference would be to say no, but the committee could go with an option whereby all twenty-odd committee chairmanships would be voted on the same day and people could run for multiple committee chairmanships. If they were elected to multiple positions, they could resign from one and then have a byelection to fill the others.

We used to have that in the way we elected members of Parliament, such that members would actually get elected to more than one seat and then they would resign from one and choose the one that they wished to sit for. I think that would be problematic, but it's a possibility that the committee may want to consider.

Mr. Blake Richards: You're not contemplating the idea of someone being able to chair more than one committee?

Mr. Brad Trost: I'm not. You could go there, but it doesn't work that way now, and I don't see how it would be practical.

You could do a tiering system such that all the committees that sit at a particular hour on the schedule would go first. You'd have a pre-set committee, so one week you'd have the first six committees elected; the next week, the next six, and so forth. Then people who did not get elected to their first preferences could run in the second or third tier. There are a multitude of—

Mr. Blake Richards: Sorry, but either way you would see this as allowing someone to run for more than one, and that if they were elected to more than one chair, the would have—

Mr. Brad Trost: If the committee wanted to go that way. Again, my preference would be, you take your luck at one position. You don't get to run for MP, MLA, and mayor at the same time. You run for one of the three, and then you go from there.

Having said that—

●(1150)

Mr. Blake Richards: What about the scenario where you split it into a few days—

Mr. Brad Trost: Then you could run for multiple positions. That would be much easier. You could forbid it at that point, but I think that would be the most pragmatic way of doing it.

Mr. Blake Richards: Obviously, under the current system, our committee here, I think with the advice of the whips, etc., does choose the membership of the committee. Obviously, I guess in your system you'd be envisioning that somehow being changed because the chair would be chosen prior to the committee list being tabled, so you'd be obviously seeking a change there.

Mr. Brad Trost: Yes, that would be implied by this motion.

Mr. Blake Richards: So in that scenario, looking at the fifth and sixth issues you have presented here to us about a chair wanting to switch committees or an election of chair when there's a resignation, etc., I think when you look at those three things and maybe some of the other issues that we've got here as well, do you not see some potential here for some games to be played? This would be an opportunity for someone to shut down the committee process, especially if one of the parties had a majority of seats on the committee, by continual resignations or changing committee lists. Do you see any way we could avoid that? I just see a potential here for a party, if they chose, to almost shut down the committee process.

Mr. Brad Trost: You could also do that now. I don't see any governing party wanting to have their chair polled repeatedly. That just slows up their legislation in committee.

You could do that, but if you have a relatively quick byelection mechanism, you resign on Thursday, the byelection is held on the following Monday or Tuesday, and by a week afterwards you're back in business then—

Mr. Blake Richards: I understand that, but I guess what I'm getting at is that you've got a system here where if someone were to resign and then someone else from another committee, a chair, wanted to run for that chair, what you could get is a whole series of resignations going on. Someone would resign from one committee to run for the next and you would continue to have byelection after byelection after byelection. That's where I see—

Mr. Brad Trost: I suppose that's a theoretical possibility, but as soon as people start to play games, they would have to be able to justify that to the members of the House, and in a secret ballot I could very easily see people playing games and not getting the confidence of their fellow members.

My observation is that members of Parliament tend to be pretty mature. We have our moments, particularly in question period, where things get out of control, but if you're going to run for office and spend energy campaigning for a position, you're not likely to resign to try to get some other position in a deal with another member when you have no guarantee that the House will ratify that. So I would say, based upon the experience of the British Parliament and my knowledge of my fellow MPs here, that's an extreme theoretical. It's so extreme, I doubt if we would see it.

The Chair: Thank you.

I just a couple of questions, Mr. Trost, from the chair's perspective. I rather like the job. I've been able to hang onto it for a fairly long time, and I would rather do it. So at the start of a Parliament, let's suggest the last Parliament after 2011, I wanted to be the chair of the procedure and House affairs committee because I rather like it, but

not winning that election I'd like to have been able to run for another seat. You're suggesting that I can't do that, or if we do it over a subsequent number of days, I can. Or even if I really just love the workload—I'd really like to chair this and agriculture, for example—I could or couldn't do it. In Your answer to the question of what problem we are trying to solve here was giving a greater sense of ownership. Well, my sense of ownership is that I'd love to do that.

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Chair, as I responded to Mr. Lukiwski, I'm mostly interested in the principle. But the question is about the sense of ownership and who right now essentially appoints committee chairs. Is it the party leadership or is it the House? I think it would be helpful if it were the House. I think, in fact I'm sure, Mr. Chair, that you've had perfect respect from opposition members all the time you've been on this committee, but not all chairs over time have. Part of that is the perception—sometimes real, sometimes imagined—that the chair is completely beholden to his leadership. If the chair is not beholden to his leadership but to the House and the entirety of the caucus, I rather suspect that opposition members would give you, or someone in a similar situation, more leeway on certain matters. I think that would be one benefit, and would in fact enhance the security of the chairmanship of most committees.

Of course, Mr. Chair, you like your position. You've done a very good job of it. But I'm sure there are other members who might like your position, too, and I know that that always frightens someone when there's an election campaign. I like being the member of Parliament in Saskatchewan, but I'm going to have to deal with Liberal, New Democrat, and Green Party candidates trying to take it away from me. I think I've done a good job, and hopefully they'll choose me again, as I'm sure you would have been chosen and elected by your peers had you run for election in this House.

● (1155)

The Chair: I have just one more question. It's about convention because the convention has always been that committees are masters of their own destiny. We've heard the Speaker say it many times when there has been a bit of a problem at committee and somebody tries to refer it to the Speaker under a point of order, and he replies that when that committee decides it has an issue and reports back to the House, then he could act because the committees are masters of their own domain, if you will. We've always thought that way too. We'd rather solve it here at the committee table than in the House.

By giving the House the authority to elect the Speaker, are we giving up some of the convention that committees are masters of their own destiny? In the big House you've now chosen the chair for those committees. I think we're giving away a bit of parliamentary tradition and the convention that committees are masters of their own destiny by choosing the chair someplace else.

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Chair, let me respond to that.

I don't mean technically, but de facto, who chooses all the members of this committee? It's not the committee itself that chooses all the members. De facto, who chooses the committee chair? I know we go through an election process, but let's be pretty clear that as far as choosing the chairmanship, the vice-chairmanship, and the membership of the committee, the committee is not master of its own destiny, in reality.

Instead of moving something away from the committee to the House, what I'm suggesting is moving something away from the whip's office effectively to the House. So the committee is not losing something, because the committee never had that to lose in the first place.

The Chair: But you're in a committee where exactly that took place, where my predecessor was voted out on a confidence motion. I was voted in, whether I wanted the job or not, and the committee made that decision. It was well after the next election before I accepted the position, and we may be sitting in the only committee where that ever happened, so it was master of its own destiny.

Anyway, thank you, Mr. Trost.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Do you mind if I ask a question because I want to pursue that very subject?

The Chair: Very quickly, then. Sure.

Mr. Scott Reid: Joe and Tom and I were all here, and I don't think anybody else in the room was here, but when that occurred that was at the end of the 39th Parliament, I think, right?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It was about eight years ago.

The Chair: I was a young man.

Mr. Scott Reid: You're still a young man.

At that time it was a highly confrontational environment. We had been given some business that profoundly divided the committee on government versus opposition lines, and it was a minority government so the opposition had control over any vote they wanted as long as they presented a united front, and that included finding no confidence in the chair, which occurred. Mr. Goodyear was voted out.

If I recall, it was very indecorous and I think I was one of the least decorous people in the room at the time. There is a Hansard of all of this, so you can decide that for yourselves.

But what happened was, one limit on.... I think the problems that were created by that—and it was very problematic and we stopped sitting—we became completely dysfunctional. We were in the context of a House that was completely dysfunctional as well, I should add, but at least they had to choose a member from among the government members. The rules say that the new chair must be a government member chosen from within this committee. At least when Joe was chosen he had some knowledge about what was going on from personal experience and some of the nuances.

This is a concern that I've had as I've listened to the discussion. At that time the rational strategy for the opposition would have been to pick some government member from outside this committee and drop that person into place. That option wasn't available. I think, in

this particular case, that limited the problems that arose from the fact that we were being pushed to deal with issues that would ultimately decide the confidence of the government. The trouble is, that kind of hothouse environment, infrequent as it is, is the moment at which it is most critical to have a set of rules that work and at this point I'm just not sure that I know the implications.

Perhaps in Britain they've had some relevant experience, but I do worry about that. That's why I'm very interested in what you have to say.

• (1200)

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Reid, just listen very carefully to what you've said. You had a dysfunctional committee under the current system. If you have a dysfunctional committee under the current system, I don't believe my system will necessarily fix every element of the dysfunction going forward.

But what you and the chair have both admitted to me is that the current system had problems that were almost insurmountable. So if I have to deal with some of the theoretical, almost insurmountable, rare circumstances in my proposal I'd also like the members to think about it in the current system because they are extremely rare but as you pointed out, they were very difficult to deal with.

Now, we could argue that Mr. Preston, because he knew the committee, was the best person to be the chair, or we could argue that someone who didn't have the emotional issues that the current members had might be better to be brought on side as someone who could start afresh. Those are arguments that can be made, and it would depend on the very details of your situation. But if you have dysfunction, it almost doesn't matter what mechanism you're dealing with. We've had issues like that under the current system, and we'll have issues like that in the future system.

As I said in my earlier remarks, when you have a committee chair whom a portion of the opposition has chosen, they have a sense of ownership of the chair too. It may not be a very great sense, but they do have a sense of ownership with that chair too, so they would be impeaching their own choice as well, not just the government's choice.

I think while that may not be a technical answer, it does provide some moral protection for the chairmanships under my proposal.

The Chair: Super. Thank you very much. We're going to end it there.

Thank you, Mr. Trost, for your input today. We have to discuss a report on this issue and the rest of committee business, so we'll be going in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• _____ (Pause) _____
•

[*Public proceedings resume*]

• (1215)

The Chair: We're back in public.

Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux, for your kind words.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Maybe I could take this opportunity to reinforce the fact that over the years, I think it goes without saying that I've had the opportunity to witness you as the chair and that I think you've done a phenomenal job of making sure the committee is functional and moving forward. I want to wish you the very best in the years ahead and I really appreciated your comments in your S.O. 31 the other day. It was in sync and very professional and touching.

We wish you the very best in the years ahead.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: To add to what Kevin was saying, let me get a little bit more personal, only because you and I and Scott—I guess the three of us—have spent a lot of time, many years, together on this committee.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: We have been here for—

The Chair: —the whole time.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It's been almost the entire time. I think I've had 10 out of my 11 years on this committee. I think you and Scott have been here that entire time. We've seen a lot of things happen. We've talked about the Gary Goodyear thing, what happened there, and I recall I had about a six-and-a-half-hour filibuster going on at one time, which precipitated, I think, the vote of non-confidence in the chair because he shut it down.

We've seen a lot of highs and a lot of lows, but one of the marks of a very good chairman, Joe—and I'll call you "Joe" just because I do consider you a very good friend—is the ability to try to reach consensus when it appears impossible to do so. You've been phenomenal at doing that. You've also had the ability to lower tensions when need be, but you've also had the ability to be very firm and disciplined when need be as well. I think David could attest to that on more than one occasion.

• (1220)

The Chair: Relevance.

Mr. David Christopherson: I speak next.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It all comes down, frankly, to the fact that you have to have the ability to inspire the members around you to work with you. We've all been here long enough. We've all seen chairs that, frankly, no one on the committee really wants to deal with, no one likes. At times they just throw up their hands. Even though they may all be on the same team, they still don't get along well with the chair.

You've avoided all that, Joe. You've really done a tremendous job, and I think it speaks well to the fact that this committee, more than any other in Parliament, is supposed to be the committee that deals with issues in a primarily non-partisan manner. We deal with so many issues that affect all parliamentarians. At times that's impossible to do because we get into game play; we all know it; we all do it.

More so than anything else, we've dealt with issues. Particularly, when I look back to the last several months, we've had issues that I think we've worked together on pretty effectively. Positions have been taken by members of all sides of this table which have been well argued and well reasoned, and those arguments have won the

day. We've put aside, I think, partisan hyperbolic arguing and chest thumping and all that sort of stuff and have really worked well together. Again, that's a testament to your leadership and what you've done here in this committee.

I could go on for a long time, but strictly from an objective standpoint, I think you've done a phenomenal job. I think your talents as chairman are obviously extremely good. Your bona fides when it comes to chairing this meeting and the subcommittee on sexual harassment, I think, go beyond the pale when it comes to what normal people have to put up with. On a personal level, Joe, you've been a great friend to all of us here, and I say that sincerely. I think you are going to be missed by all of us, not just because of the role you've played as a chairman but just because of you as a person. You've really made our lives a lot easier and I've enjoyed coming to committee with you at the helm.

Thank you for everything you do. I know you're going to be successful. I know you're probably going to be expanding your fast-food empire when you get out of this place. Good on you. Don't make yourself a stranger, because you're going to be more than welcome to come back here at any time. On behalf of myself and all my colleagues, and, in fact, the entire government caucus, thank you for everything you've done. You've just been a tremendous friend and a tremendous chairman.

Good on you and good luck and God bless you.

The Chair: Thanks, Tom.

There's more?

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

I want to join in with my colleagues and only marginally less than Mr. Lukiwski, because no one is perfect and there are times when I've been infuriated by rulings that you've made, as you know, especially when they affected me in relation to relevance or repetition.

Joe, you and I go back to when we were both rookies. We were in Taiwan together, early on.

The Chair: It was very early on.

Mr. David Christopherson: I think it was within the first year of our mandate. So we've known each other for quite some time, being from the same province and area within the country.

You really have been an outstanding chair, Joe. It's very difficult. I have no doubt that along the way there has been pressure from the government, as there is going to be on any chair, particularly this one. But you've been sufficiently insulated from that to the extent that when it was time for you to make a judgment call, I always had a sense that it was your judgment, and based on fairness. Quite frankly, if it ruffled a few feathers in your own camp, you were prepared to suffer those consequences. That means a lot to the opposition. That's not to say that when there are times to hard-line it, because the government has a position.... You are a government member, and under the current system, notwithstanding the previous discussion, it's still decided in large part by the whips.

To pick up where Tom...and I'll try not to be repetitive.

The Chair: Especially with you.

Mr. David Christopherson: I think the way you handled meetings.... When I became a chair here, I tried to take some of the lessons I saw from you, especially your use of humour—often self-deprecating. But often you were able to lower the temperature because of your sense of humour and the people skills you have. I don't want to get maudlin about it, but I have to tell you, Joe, I think you should be giving classes and instructing others. I'm keeping in the back of my mind, if the opportunity is ever there that we're looking for someone to chair meetings, regardless of what...because of what you bring to it.

Not only that, having been a chair, you also are more than willing to step in to make sure that it's being steered in the right direction; we didn't just sit there and stare at each other. When there was nowhere to go, you would, in consultation with the clerk, quickly come up with some path that would let us move forward. Often that's the trick here, just to keep moving forward and not get bogged down.

I just think it's been a tremendous term for you. This is my second long-term commitment to this committee. I've enjoyed it. I've been in politics 30 years now, and as much as it might look as though I still enjoy our getting up and yelling at each other, and I do to some degree, it really doesn't bring me near as much joy as when adversaries lay down their arms and work towards a common goal. After all these years in politics, that excites me, because that's when we're really getting something done. But it can't be done without leadership, and that's what you provided.

I also want to offer up my thanks to all the members, quite frankly, but a special thanks to Tom—notwithstanding a couple of tough spots we had. But those are bound to happen. I think we rebounded from them. What I've always enjoyed, and I'll end on this, was that when it came time for the politics to come into this, as it had to, it never came in through the silly-bugger door. It was always right up front. It was “Okay, we're going in the ditch; this is going to be political”, or “That's where we are, and that's just the way it is.”

• (1225)

The Chair: The hatchets are out.

Mr. David Christopherson: Tom, you're very straight-up that way, a man of your word. The only time I had to question that, I knew in my own heart it wasn't your doing; it was from on high. And on a personal level, I think you know that's my feeling about it.

I've enjoyed working with you. You're an honourable man. You're not afraid to take risks. When you give your word, it means something. The lack of any games is what really helps. I've enjoyed this. Aside from chairing my own committee, this is where I've actually had the most fun, notwithstanding the hard work we've done.

But back to you, Chair, all of this is because of the chair that you provided. You've done a great job. I do hope that in some fashion or another you'll still play some role in public life, because I think you have a lot to offer. I think there's still more of it that you could give to the Canadian people that we would benefit from.

Joe, thank you, it's been an honour.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you, David.

Alexandrine is back, and then I get the last microphone.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: I did mention in my farewell speech last week how much I enjoyed working on this committee. I was lucky enough to be named on the procedure and house affairs committee a few weeks after I was elected for the first time. I was lucky enough to spend my whole mandate here. It's truly an honour, because when I hear some of my colleagues talking about their committees and how it's difficult sometimes and how sometimes they just don't like it or something, I think I'm so lucky to have you as my chair, and all of my colleagues. Really, it was so interesting, and it was always one of my favourite parts of the week, coming here and being able to do some really good work with all of you.

I really hope I'm able to work with you again later. It was really wonderful. I want to thank the clerk and the researcher too, because I don't think this committee could work as well as it does if it weren't for you all.

Thank you.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you all for the kind words.

I'm the same way. I remember the day Jay Hill called me and told me that I was going to the procedure and House affairs committee to sit as a member. I went, what the hell did I do wrong?

The only other committee I sat on before that was in opposition, and it was the government operations committee. It was a shit show, pardon my language, but it truly was. It was one of those committees that I said I would avoid at all costs.

And so I recognize, as Tom said, that we went through some very partisan times in the procedure and House affairs committee when I first came here—and I mean over the top partisan times. We voted out the chair and elected Joe, whether or not he was screaming, “I don't want the job”. It didn't matter. All the way through the contempt of Parliament hearings at the end of whatever Parliament that was, which I was chairing, it was a very hard time.

Nonetheless, it's always been a bit enjoyable. Certainly I think this chair is the best chair to hold in the House, if it weren't for the Speaker's chair. That's the best role there is, getting a group of people to go in one direction. Even though they want to hit each other with the oars, they start pulling them in the right direction.

David, you're right that it was always a failure if we couldn't come up with consensus, because that's what we're supposed to do when we're sent here.

I said it at the dinner for retiring members that 308 men and women—soon to be 338—come to this place, all for the same reason, all for altruistic reasons. We all come here saying we're going to make our little area of Canada better. And we all do. We do it in drastically different ways. And we do it with drastically different political principles or philosophies. But that doesn't make one right and the other wrong; it simply makes them our own, and that's what makes this place work.

So I thank you all for all of that. And it works really well.

To the help, to the researchers, and especially to Marie-France, I had a few other committee clerks, you'll all remember. We had some other committee clerks who weren't nearly as good. They could look themselves up.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I loved what I've had in this last House. I often get this thing heading toward the ditch in a pretty good way, but you don't know it. Occasionally my arm is grabbed in panic: where the hell are you taking this? Just let it go. We'll get there, right? If we go right into the ditch, I've got a great clerk. She'll get us out of there.

The whole answer was—horse people will tell you this—give some reins, and the horse will straighten itself out. If you try to harness it too much, and I see committee chairs try to do that too, it just doesn't....

I've had great members on this committee who are willing to go the extra mile, say the extra thing to come to a conclusion, rather than to antagonize each other.

So to Marie-France, a clerk who let me chair in a way.... I'm not a procedures guy, I've never been, I never will be. And maybe that's who needs to be in these chairs more. The Speaker shouldn't be a procedures guy, and the chair in procedure and House affairs shouldn't be a procedures guy, because it's about the concept of getting it right and making this place run better. Sometimes softening the rules is better than hardening the rules.

I thank you all. It's been great.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: We are adjourned.

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