



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Finance**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, February 4, 2016**

—  
**Chair**

**The Honourable Wayne Easter**



## Standing Committee on Finance

Thursday, February 4, 2016

•(1105)

[English]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Suzie Cadieux):** Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum. I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, cannot entertain points of order, nor participate in debate.

[Translation]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party.

I am ready to receive motions for the chair.

[English]

Mr. MacKinnon.

[Translation]

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.):** I nominate the Honourable Wayne Easter, member for Malpeque, as chair of the Standing Committee on Finance.

[English]

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Mr. MacKinnon that Mr. Easter be elected as chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried, and Mr. Wayne Easter duly elected chair of the committee.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Clerk:** I invite Mr. Easter to take the chair.

**The Chair (Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.)):** I'll leave it with the clerk for the election of the vice-chairs.

**The Clerk:** I'm now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair, who must be a member of the official opposition.

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC):** I'd like to nominate Ron Liepert.

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Lisa Raitt that Mr. Ron Liepert be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

[Translation]

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried and Ron Liepert duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

[English]

**The Clerk:** Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

I am now prepared to receive a motion for the second vice-chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Ouellette, you may go ahead.

**Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.):** I would like to nominate Guy Caron as second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Monsieur Ouellette that Monsieur Caron be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

[Translation]

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried and Guy Caron duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

[English]

**The Chair:** The analyst is handing out copies of the routine motions. We'll go through them one by one. We'll discuss and debate them and come to a decision.

I'll begin by saying thank you for your support. We have a lot of work ahead of us as a finance committee. Hopefully we can get along relatively well most of the time, but being politics, there will be some give and throw. There's no doubt about that.

I will tell you where I come from, as chair. We do recognize that the government has an agenda. They have laid out their action plan. They have a responsibility to carry out that agenda based on the election that was just held. As members of Parliament, from all parties, who are not members of the executive council, we have a responsibility too. It's somewhat different from that of the executive council. We have a responsibility to improve legislation where possible; to make proposals; and to not be afraid, regardless of where we sit, to challenge the government to improve legislation.

I hope we can do what is best as a committee for all Canadians, given where we come from. We come from a lot of different backgrounds. There's a lot of experience in many different walks of life on this committee. I think that's all to the better for Canadians.

That's where I come from, as chair. We'll try to be as neutral as possible and not get into too many arguments with Phil.

We'll turn now to routine motions. The first one is entitled "Service of Analysts from the Library of Parliament". Do you want me to read that, or can somebody move it?

Steven so moves:

That the Committee retain the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament, as needed, to assist the Committee in its work, at the discretion of the Chair.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1110)

**The Chair:** The next is "Reduced Quorum":

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive and publish evidence when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three (3) members are present, and provided that one (1) is from government and one (1) is from opposition.

To the new committee members, these are the routine motions of the previous committee. You have the right to amend them as you see fit. We'll get into a discussion and make a decision as a committee if amendments come forward.

Mr. McColeman so moves this motion.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Next is "Distribution of Documents":

That only the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to distribute documents to the members of the Committee and only when the documents exist in both official languages, and that the Clerk notify all witnesses of this requirement in advance.

That is moved by Mr. MacKinnon.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** "Working Meals" is the next one:

That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide for working meals for the Committee and its subcommittees.

That is moved by Mr. Sorbara.

The members who have been here will know how wonderful those meals are. The sandwiches are good.

**Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** One request....

**The Chair:** One request...?

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** Tuna on brown.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Okay, Phil, tuna on brown.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The next motion is entitled "Witnesses' Expenses":

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two (2) representatives per organization;

and that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be at the discretion of the Chair.

Is there a mover?

**Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Lib.):** So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** We now have "Staff at in camera meeting":

That, unless otherwise ordered, each Committee member in attendance be allowed to have one (1) staff member attend in camera meetings and that each party be allowed to have one (1) staff member from its Whip or House Leader's Office attend in camera meetings.

Is there a mover?

That is moved by Mr. MacKinnon.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Next is "In camera meeting transcripts":

That one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the Committee Clerk's office for consultation by members of the Committee.

That is moved by Ms. O'Connell.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Now we have notices of motions:

That 48 hours notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the Committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration; that the notice of motion be filed with the Clerk of the Committee and distributed to members in both official languages, and that motions received by the Clerk of the Committee by 4:00 p.m. from Monday to Thursday and by 2:00 p.m. on Friday be distributed to the members the same day.

Is there a mover?

That is moved by Mr. Sorbara. Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

**Mr. Raj Grewal:** Mr. Chair, we would like to propose an amendment to the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

The amendment is as follows:

That the Sub-committee on Agenda and Procedure be composed of the Chair, the two Vice-Chairs and two members of the government: Francesco Sorbara and Steven MacKinnon.

**The Chair:** You have a motion before you. Is there any discussion?

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Could it be repeated?

**Mr. Raj Grewal:** Yes. No problem.

The proposal is that the motion on the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be read as follows:

That the Sub-committee on Agenda and Procedure be composed of the Chair, the two Vice-Chairs and two members of the government: Francesco Sorbara and Steven MacKinnon.

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** How many women does that put on the executive or the subcommittee of this finance committee?

**The Chair:** That would be none.

Is there any other debate or discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** “When a witness appears”, do I have a motion?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Mr. Chair, I would like to move the following motion regarding the appearance of witnesses before the committee:

That witnesses be given five (5) to ten (10) minutes at the discretion of the Chair to make their opening statement....

As for the order of questioners and the time allocated to them, the first round would be as follows: Liberal Party, 7 minutes; Conservative Party, 7 minutes; Liberal Party, 7 minutes; NDP, 7 minutes. The second round would be as follows: Conservative Party, 5 minutes; Liberal Party, 5 minutes; Conservative Party, 5 minutes; Liberal Party, 5 minutes; NDP, 3 minutes. That's a total of 50 minutes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Is everyone clear on what that motion said or do you want it read again?

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** I'd prefer to have it read again because I did miss the latter part of the first round I think.

**The Chair:** Could you read it again, Steve, please?

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** The whole thing, Phil? I'm fine with that.

[*Translation*]

That witnesses be given five (5) to ten (10) minutes at the discretion of the Chair to make their opening statement....

The first round would be as follows: Liberal Party, 7 minutes; Conservative Party, 7 minutes; Liberal Party, 7 minutes; NDP, 7 minutes. The second round would be as follows: Conservative Party, 5 minutes; Liberal Party, 5 minutes; Conservative Party, 5 minutes; Liberal Party, 5 minutes; NDP, 3 minutes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Are we clear on the motion? Ms. Raitt made the point that a minister be given 15 minutes. Are you adding that into your motion as well?

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Mr. Caron.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** May I propose an amendment?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** As always you can move a motion.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Thank you.

Overall, I have no objection to the total amount of time and the manner in which it's allocated. However, I would like to suggest that, in keeping with the committee's tradition, each party be allowed to make a statement or ask its questions before another party is permitted to speak a second time.

As for how the time is allocated, it suits me fine, but I would suggest amending the first round as follows: Liberal Party, 7 minutes;

Conservative Party, 7 minutes; NDP, 7 minutes; and then Liberal Party, 7 minutes.

• (1120)

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** I have no problem with that.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Are we agreed on that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay, we're agreed on that.

Ms. Raitt, do you want it in?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** No.

**The Chair:** Okay. All those in favour?

**Mr. Guy Caron:** On my amendment?

**The Chair:** Yes, on your amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

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

**The Chair:** These are motions that are specific to this committee as compared to others. The first motion is “PBO and Private Members' Bill”:

That, consistent with the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) mandate to provide estimates of the financial cost of proposals before Parliament (as outlined in section 79.2 of the Parliament of Canada Act), the PBO automatically always provide the Committee, within 45 calendar days of a Private Members' Business item's appearance on the Private Members' Business Order of Precedence, a detailed and comprehensive costing analysis of all such items and that the costing analysis shall a) be restricted to the motion or legislation as written and b) include a detailed description of the methodology used.

Is there a mover for that motion?

It is moved by Mr. MacKinnon.

Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Next is “PBO and Economic and Fiscal Outlook”:

That, consistent with the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) mandate to provide independent analysis about the state of Canada's finances and trends in the national economy (as outlined in section 79.2 of the Parliament of Canada Act), the PBO provide an economic and fiscal outlook to the Committee the fourth week of October and April of every calendar year, and be available to appear before the Committee to discuss its findings shortly thereafter.

Is there a mover?

It is moved by Ms. O'Connell.

Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** On the annual update on tax changes recommended by Finance Canada, we have that the Finance Department provide an annual—

Mr. Grewal.

**Mr. Raj Grewal:** Mr. Chair, we would like to move that this motion be deleted in its entirety.

**The Chair:** There's a motion to delete that motion.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Caron.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** I'd like to understand the rationale behind the member's request.

I probably would have been in favour of removing the last part, since we no longer have a Conservative government. The issue of technical changes to the tax system remains, however.

I've been on the committee, and we went through all the stages of a lengthy bill intended to correct numerous anomalies in the system and close several loopholes. Furthermore, at the end of it, we had to study the various recommendations of the Canada Revenue Agency and the agreements that had been reached. In light of that, such a report strikes me as being useful to the Standing Committee on Finance.

So I'd like to understand why the members on the other side want to get rid of that motion.

[English]

**The Chair:** We're technically correct. I'll read the motion. Somebody needs to move the motion first. Then if you're still of the same position, Mr. Grewal, you'd move a motion to delete.

I'll read the motion, "Annual Update on Tax Changes Recommendations by Finance Canada":

That the Finance Department provide an annual update to the Committee on the status of all outstanding technical tax changes in an effort to ensure regular and timely legislation as already committed by the Conservative government.

Is somebody moving that?

It is moved by Mr. Caron.

That's the motion on the record. We'll have to amend it.

You're moving to delete.

• (1125)

**Mr. Raj Grewal:** I am, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Okay, that's open for discussion.

I think Mr. Caron asked if you could give an explanation as to why you're of the opinion that it should be deleted.

**Mr. Raj Grewal:** Basically in the previous government they had these massive omnibus bills and every time a tax change was announced, they would say, "Oh, this is the 130th tax change; this is the 131st tax change". It's just an inefficient way of running this committee. We believe there is a better way of doing business and that's why the recommendation is that this motion be deleted.

**The Chair:** Mr. MacKinnon and then Ms. Raitt.

[Translation]

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** We would be open to revisiting such a motion at a later time. We hope we have seen the last of mammoth bills. As for the arrangements of the committee, it is our view that we can live without it for now.

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** While we're not going to be opposing the motion, I would note that I certainly hope this government won't abandon the notion of decreasing taxes and having technical tax changes going forward so that we can actually manage our economy better.

**The Chair:** Mr. Caron.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** I understand what the government is trying to do here, but the motion doesn't refer to creating an omnibus bill to make changes to the tax system. Instead, it allows the committee to receive, on an ad-hoc or annual basis, a report on the changes, so that we can prepare for any changes the government could make.

The last mammoth bill containing technical changes to the tax system was 967 pages long. Even though we currently have no mammoth bill, a number of elements dating back to 2001, 2002 and 2003 need to be dealt with. It would be helpful for the committee to know where those regulations stand, given that they often stem from agreements with the Canada Revenue Agency. It would also be helpful for the committee to know the government's intentions in that regard. Having such a report doesn't force the government to bring forward an omnibus bill in order to adopt the changes.

[English]

**The Chair:** This is just a technical error on the part of the chair, probably the first one ever. We do not need the motion to delete. The procedure, I'm told by the clerk, would be that the motion is on the floor and those who are opposed to the motion would vote against the motion, or if there are further amendments related to the motion, I'm willing to accept those as well.

I see Mr. McColeman's hand coming forward.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** I tend to lean towards the position of my colleague from the NDP on this, but I think the obvious change in the motion has to be "the Liberal government" and not "the Conservative government", Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Or I would suggest as well, Mr. McColeman, that if you take out "as already committed by the Conservative government" that leaves it open to any government. You don't need to say a party.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** I would be okay then.

**The Chair:** The amendment would be to delete the words "as already committed by the Conservative government."

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** I tend to agree that it doesn't hurt, from time to time, to review these things, and regardless of the contemplation of any tabled legislation, omnibus or otherwise, it's not a bad idea.

**The Chair:** Okay, there is an amendment on the floor to delete "as already committed by the Conservative government."

Is there any discussion on that?

We're voting on the amendment to delete that section.

(Amendment agreed to)

**The Chair:** On the motion as amended, is there any discussion?

Mr. Ouellette.

**Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette:** I'm just a little bit concerned that we have here “outstanding technical tax changes” so I'd like to get further clarification about exactly what “outstanding” means. It just seems like a bit of jargon that perhaps many of us are not familiar with. Perhaps this is their way of tightening up the language or coming up with some way of actually explaining it. Is there a way the analyst could give an explanation of that, please?

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Is there an analyst who can explain that? Could we call one of the analysts to come up?

Maybe introduce yourself and go forth. Welcome. I should have invited you to the table earlier. My apologies.

Just state your name.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michaël Lambert-Racine (Analyst, Library of Parliament):** Good morning. My name is Michaël Lambert-Racine, and I worked for the Standing Committee on Finance from the spring of 2013 to the fall of 2014. It's a pleasure to be back with the committee.

As for the question, as far as I know, they are changes that were proposed but never adopted.

To be perfectly honest with you, I would prefer to get back to you later in order to clarify that, because I'm not 100% certain of the answer.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Caron.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Very often, in fact, these changes stem from agreements with the Canada Revenue Agency. What happens is a taxpayer, be it a company or an individual, proposes using a tax code or asks the Canada Revenue Agency whether it would accept a specific procedure, given a legal vacuum in the Income Tax Act. The Canada Revenue Agency then decides whether or not that use is acceptable.

However, even if the Canada Revenue Agency determines that the proposed procedure is acceptable, the Income Tax Act isn't automatically amended. Consequently, some of the Canada Revenue Agency's decisions in these cases date back 10 or 15 years and have yet to be incorporated into the Income Tax Act. Very often, what that does is negatively affect other amendments that are subsequently proposed by the Canada Revenue Agency. These kinds of situations create a lot of confusion because the Income Tax Act is silent on them.

Technically, upon examination, the government proposes these amendments so that they can be adopted, thereby giving all members of the tax community, experts, advisors and so forth, a uniform understanding of the legislation and the decisions that were made.

**Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette:** So you're saying that the Canada Revenue Agency changes its procedures without codifying it in the legislation.

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Precisely, unless the government amends the Income Tax Act.

**Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette:** So the agency is applying—  
[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Ouellette, we have Ms. O'Connell first, and then you.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.):** My question was answered. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Ouellette.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette:** So that means CRA is applying legislation that doesn't exist.

**Mr. Guy Caron:** They are decisions that were made by CRA.

The act is extremely complex, you realize. Taxpayers propose certain elements that haven't been provided for in the legislation or that fall in a grey area. Instead of going ahead and adopting a given practice, the taxpayer will ask the Canada Revenue Agency for an advance decision on the matter. The agency then states whether the practice is acceptable or not. That step protects the taxpayer against future prosecution were the agency to determine that the practice was not acceptable. That's why the system works.

The system falls short, however, to the extent that the government does not systematically call for the incorporation of those amendments in the Income Tax Act and other tax legislation. As a result, the Canada Revenue Agency has made decisions and authorized taxpayers to use certain methods, without necessarily validating those practices formally through legislation. Some of these decisions go back quite a while. I believe the last technical tax amendments bill contained decisions going back to 2001. They were finally ratified in that bill in 2013, if memory serves me correctly.

The motion doesn't call for all of those yet-to-be-confirmed decisions to be included in a bill. The motion states that, on an annual basis, the Standing Committee on Finance should be made aware of the decisions that were made so that it knows where things stand. It may also be appropriate to inform the committee of the government's intentions in that regard.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. MacKinnon.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** In this new spirit of cooperation, I think we can make a concession. We are able to reconsider our decision and adopt the motion if that would make my colleague happy.

• (1135)

[*English*]

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

All those in favour of the motion as amended?

Mr. Ouellette.

**Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to vote against it, because I think we can still tighten up this language. I don't think it's tight enough about what it is we're exactly looking for.

**The Chair:** Okay. You're voting against it.

All those in favour?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

**The Chair:** Just so you know for future reference, Mr. Ouellette, if you want to call for a recorded vote, you can. That one's over, but it's your right to call for a recorded vote if you want one.

Next is tabling of motions outside of the normal committee schedule. The motion reads:

That during meetings held outside its regular schedule, the Committee do not consider substantive motions.

It's moved by Mr. MacKinnon. Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Next is "Briefs published on the Committee's Website". The motion states:

That briefs received by the Committee and related to its studies be published on the Committee's Website.

That's moved by Mr. Sorbara. Is there any discussion? All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Do you have a point you want to raise, Mr. McColeman?

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** I'd just like to know where we're going next on the agenda.

**The Chair:** I've asked the clerk about this. This meeting was scheduled just for the organization of the committee. If it's the will of the committee—and I think it would be sensible for us—to decide what we want to do over the next at least short period, I think we'd need unanimous consent for that.

Is there agreement to hold just a brief organizational meeting on what we want to do over the next couple of weeks?

**Some hon. member:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay, we're agreed.

Mr. McColeman is first.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** First of all, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank the committee for agreeing to that with unanimous consent, because I think there are some pre-budget issues that are very top of mind right now. We could get to work fairly rapidly and fairly rigorously on what is currently happening within the walls of the House of Commons, namely the fact that it's been kind of laid out that this committee would have conducted pre-budget consultations across the country as its regular mandate as a committee. That did not happen and that causes some concern. That's not to diminish the consultations that all of us have done in our own world, our own areas of the country, but I think this committee has a role and a responsibility to commence very actively along the lines of providing the voice for many organizations I've spoken with who perhaps haven't had the chance. I've yet to see exactly who has been part of the minister's tables across the country, but we had acknowledged that.

As a past committee chair—and I'm not trying to be a usurper on this in any way, sir—I know that the one overriding rule of all committees is that we are the masters of our own destiny and that we can decide to do whatever we wish to do at any point in time, and we are not to be dictated to by any outward influence or source. I believe that's the direction the chair laid on the table for us at the start of his opening comments.

That said, I would propose a motion at this point that the Standing Committee on Finance invite the Honourable Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance, to appear as the first witness to commence the committee's 2016 pre-budget consultations, along with senior officials from the Department of Finance; and that the minister appear to inform committee members about the ministerial mandate letter.

I would place that before the committee as our first order of business. I know that having no idea of when we might have a budget means that we may be pressed for time. I think we should have an open discussion, if we decide to go forward with this, about the frequency with which we meet. Doing so could commence rapidly, depending on the number of witnesses proposed. As you know, in an exaggerated fashion it could entail meetings 24-7 if we desire to do that, to hear from as many people as possible.

This in no way, shape, or form is an attempt to push back the date that the finance minister has in mind for the budget. In fact, it's the opposite. It's an attempt to say to this committee that we would desire to immediately get on with hearing the important witnesses that this committee has traditionally heard in the past, and we would like to do it in a fashion that produces input from all the important sources around this country that have been missed because this committee was not constituted. We will do that forthwith, with as much frequency as we need to so that we can provide the minister with the information we receive from those stakeholders across the country, which would probably mean we'd need to act very quickly in order to get that input to the minister on the budget.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** I see Mr. Ouellette next.

I'll just read the motion—it is in order—so that people are clear on what it says. It reads that the Standing Committee on Finance invite the Honourable Bill Morneau, the Minister of Finance, to appear as the first witness to commence the committee's 2016 pre-budget consultations, along with senior officials from the Department of Finance, and that the minister appear to inform committee members about a ministerial mandate letter.

If I could, just for a minute, in the Standing Orders, the pre-budget hearing process is.... I'll read what it says.

Commencing on the first sitting day in September of each year, the Standing Committee on Finance shall be authorized to consider and make reports upon proposals regarding the budgetary policy of the government. Any report or reports thereon may be made no later than the [third] sitting day before the last [scheduled] sitting day in December, as set forth in Standing Order 28(2).

I guess, Mr. McColeman, normal pre-budget hearings.... We were in an election, so that kind of scuttled the committee's ability to do those kinds of pre-budget consultations. I looked back, and in 2008 the previous government and the previous committee weren't able to hold them either.



The motion is on the floor. In anticipation that there would be a request for the minister, I talked to the minister's office. The first Thursday back would be better for the minister's schedule than the first Tuesday.

But the motion's on the floor and we should debate it.

Mr. Ouellette and then Mr. MacKinnon.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette:** I think inviting the Minister of Finance, Mr. Morneau, is an excellent idea. I fully support your suggestion.

I would also like to propose that we invite the parliamentary budget officer to appear. I'd like an opportunity to ask him questions about where Canada's finances currently stand and what's happening.

Therefore, I'd like to add to the motion that the committee invite the parliamentary budget officer, along with senior officials from his office, to appear before the committee. Perhaps it would be better to propose a second motion.

• (1145)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. MacKinnon.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** I don't have the language of the motion before me, but I think, as my colleague says, we're in general agreement. There's just some prescriptive language in the motion that I think we could probably do away with. I think a simple invitation to the Minister of Finance would suffice. Needless to say, members of the committee can ask him about whatever they'd like to ask him about. Given the timing, there's no question that pre-budget issues will be top of mind, but I think a simple invitation to the minister would suffice.

**The Chair:** Now—and we'll likely have a discussion on this—I believe Mr. Champagne, the parliamentary secretary, has offered to add something. Is that okay with committee members? He's not officially a member of the committee. Are we okay?

Mr. Caron.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** I'd like to speak as a committee member, if possible, before we hear from observers. Even though we are very glad to have the parliamentary secretary here to contribute to the work of the Standing Committee on Finance, there's something I'd like to raise first, if I may.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** He would be an observer, yes.

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Yes. As a standing member, can I actually be allowed to speak first?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** I have no problem with that, Mr. Chair. If my colleague wishes to speak first, it would be my pleasure to listen.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. McColeman, you wanted to speak first, and then we'll go to Mr. Champagne if we're agreed.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** Sure.

I first want to clarify the motion, to be as clear as we can, because of what Mr. MacKinnon said regarding it being prescriptive.

It is prescriptive in the sense that we need to engage as quickly as possible and mobilize as quickly as possible in pre-budget consultations for a lot of voices in this country that have not at this point had the opportunity to weigh in with their thoughts on what should be in the budget. It's a simple fact. As in past committees, when you embark as a committee upon a particular subject matter, the minister typically is your first witness, and the government officials.

In response, as well, to Mr. Ouellette on inviting additional people, that won't naturally follow, because we will be seized with inviting and submitting lists of people who we think are important to hear from. As the mover of the motion, I don't think I'd be agreeable to adding other groups at this point, because that will follow immediately following the minister. We don't want to confuse the purpose of our first meeting, which is to hear from the minister and his officials. We don't want to add people into that. We want to hear specifically from them. They lead the way on this, and then the other groups follow. That might be the PBO immediately after or it might be others; it will be others, if we go down this road.

To the chair's comments about the minister's schedule, it's totally understandable. They're very busy and such, but we needed to get on with this yesterday. In my view, if the committee needs to reorganize its meeting schedule to accommodate the minister, I think the committee should do that. I think the committee should say, "We need the minister now and whatever the minister's schedule is, then we as a committee will attempt to accommodate him so that we can get on with our work."

**The Chair:** We have copies of the motion, but the motion is in English only. We would need the consent of the committee to distribute it, because it is in English only and it should be translated into both languages.

Do I have unanimous permission to hand out the motion in English?

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Before the vote, can we take a five-minute recess?

**The Chair:** Mr. MacKinnon.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I simply want to point out that I'm sure we can come to some sort of agreement without any prolonged procedural wrangling. I think we'd rapidly find consensus if we—

**The Chair:** I don't think that's a point of order.

**Mr. Guy Caron:** I'd like to get a five-minute recess, if possible, to consider the question.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** We can suspend for five minutes, if there's agreement.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll suspend for five minutes.

• (1150) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1155)

**The Chair:** We'll come back to order.

Mr. McColeman, I'll turn the floor over to you first.

• (1200)

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** Thank you.

I would say that it has been a good discussion. I will withdraw my motion, which was previously proposed, and propose that we have an open discussion based on the previous discussions while we were out of order, which I'll leave up to Mr. MacKinnon to articulate.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. MacKinnon.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** If it is the pleasure of the committee, we will ask the clerk to invite certain witnesses for the purposes of pre-budget consultations, appearing as early as February 16. Breaking with the norm, we will invite the minister. On February 18, at our regular meeting, he will appear with whomever he wishes to bring and tell us whatever he wishes to tell us. Pre-budget consultations will continue after that and take however much time is needed. I think that sums it up.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Are we saying a regular two-hour meeting on the Tuesday? What we talked about in our discussions was that we're running out of time as the budget will soon be prepared. As a committee, we want to be fair to the witnesses and to allow the analysts and the Library of Parliament the time to put together what the committee hears and the committee-approved recommendations and the evidence, and ensure that it's done in a fashion that at least has some input into the budget. Our problem is that we're rapidly running out of time.

Would we want to do extended hours on Tuesday the 16th, maybe meet for extended hours on Wednesday, extended hours on Thursday, and hold that two-hour session on the Thursday open to the minister and officials, and hear pre-budget submissions from Canadians and organizations during the other time frame? Is that what we're hearing?

Mr. McColeman.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** Yes, I think you've captured the intent.

If necessary I would suggest that we meet every day that week for three-hour meetings, which would extend our normal sitting time. It would be an extra hour to listen to those people who would love to come and give us their pre-budget views, and that we submit those witness lists as quickly as possible.

I have no illusions. I know this is going to put a big stress on our clerk and staff to make this happen, but we need to giddy up and I would ask, through you, Mr. Chair, that we encourage a very speedy process to come to that report afterwards as well. I would like, perhaps through you, to meet with the support staff on this committee to see how fast we might be able to get that done.

**The Chair:** I have one other question.

I haven't been on the finance committee—I've sat in I think a couple of times—and I don't think we can do it nearly as extensively as the previous committees have done because we have a time frame. I would ask the clerk or the analysts, what are the types of hours that the finance committee has met in the past to accommodate witnesses in an intensive way? Can anybody give me that information?

Go ahead.

**Ms. Christine Lafrance (Legislative Clerk):** I used to be the clerk of the finance committee.

The finance committee usually had three-hour meetings, two panels per meeting, so it was a 90-minute panel, composed of six witnesses per panel.

**The Chair:** That would be 12 witnesses for the three hours.

**Ms. Christine Lafrance:** Twelve witnesses per half day, for three hours.

**The Chair:** Did they only meet for three hours a day and no longer?

**Ms. Christine Lafrance:** They could have met two times a day.

• (1205)

**The Chair:** They met six hours a day by times.

**An hon. member:** They did or they could have?

**Ms. Christine Lafrance:** They did.

**The Chair:** I know you said three, Phil, but I think we're up against a wall here. I think that if we're going to do it and be fair, then we really have to meet intensively that first week.

Mr. Caron.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** I'm familiar with the time constraints this committee is subject to, having sat on it for two or three years. I agree that, most of the time, we held 3-hour meetings. Generally speaking, for pre-budget consultations that began in September and ended in November or December, we would hold, on average, 12 to 15 three-hour meetings, totalling anywhere from 36 to 45 hours.

We can't squeeze that many hours in now, but we could come close by holding intensive meetings the week after the break. If it is the pleasure of the committee, I suggest planning for the days of the following week and ending there. Even though we won't have 36 or 45 hours under our belt, we still need to conduct some meaningful consultation.

Pre-budget consultations have already been submitted to the government in the course of the process. We aren't reinventing the wheel here. Very often, we look to those consultations for guidance in choosing witnesses. It can be done fairly quickly.

I suggest the committee meet for up to six hours a day. We could do that on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, in other words, the 16th, 17th and 18th. We would need to meet for at least three days, but if the committee wishes, we could meet for just as long for four days, ending on Thursday, February 25.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** It would end on the 25th?

**Mr. Guy Caron:** Thursday of the following week, February 25.  
[English]

**The Chair:** Yes.

Can anybody from the Library of Parliament tell me how long it takes to do that work once you have all the evidence from those witnesses? How long does it take the Library of Parliament? We don't want them working 24 hours a day either. How long does it take them to do that work?

**Mr. Michaël Lambert-Racine:** From the time we meet the last witness, we would need at least a minimum of three weeks to be able to write the report, to get it translated, and to distribute it to members. After that, they would be able to consider a written report and there would be a sort of common revision process.

**The Chair:** So if we run—

I'm sorry, Ms. Raitt.

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** That's okay. Actually, I was on the same train of thought, Mr. Chair.

We're kind of throwing darts in the dark here, because we don't know when the budget is going to be, and we're making some assumptions. I do not want it to be the fact that a budget is going to be postponed because they're waiting for the finance committee. That certainly is not the intent of the opposition. We would like to see a budget. We would like to see the plan as quickly as possible.

If the government members have a notion that they can help us with and let us know when they think the budget will be, we will meet their schedule and we will go to their date. They don't have to tell me when it is. I know it's a big secret. I used to sit in government as well.

That being said, I certainly want to make it very clear that on our side of the House it's not our interest to have the finance committee pre-budget consultation be a reason or an excuse for why the budget isn't forthcoming. I hope I'm clear in my concern on the matter.

That being said, we'll go around the clock.

**The Chair:** Mr. MacKinnon.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** While we're being clear—and we're certainly not going to change the tradition of the prerogative of the finance minister to announce his own budget date—

• (1210)

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** All these are [Inaudible—Editor].

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Let us just be clear. If I'm understanding what we've discussed already, the last time a similar circumstance was encountered, in 2008, the government of the day was unable, unwilling, or whatever “un” you care to apply, to do expedited or whatever sorts of consultations. That's the first thing I wanted to clarify.

The second point is that, in the absence of formal consultations by this committee, as contemplated in the Standing Orders, the minister—I think all members, to be fair—and his parliamentary secretary have put in place numerous means of meaningful consultation right across the country, involving hundreds of thousands of submissions, speeches, interventions, meetings, and so on. Those continue, I think, to this day and beyond.

I just want us to be frank, realistic, and honest with each other that this cannot be, of necessity, a full-blown consultation, as contemplated in earlier years. I don't know if that changes the time frame for the drafting of a report. This process cannot, as Madam Raitt says, delay a budget, if that would be the impact on whatever date the minister is contemplating.

We may have to go through the earnest process of soliciting and listening to witnesses. But as for the time to deliberate and come up with a proper set of formulations, I think we all just need to be very realistic about the time available to us and the capacity of this committee to follow its rules and to do meaningful consultation.

I expect that I speak for all of my colleagues on this side of the table. We are prepared, as well, to do as much consultation and hear as many people as we are able to within the time frame afforded to us. But I want to have it on the record that, first, a meaningful consultation has occurred and is occurring as we speak; and second, that the report that emanates from the consultation process may not be the kind of report that I'm sure this committee would be able to come up with given the timelines we will be given in subsequent years.

**The Chair:** I'll go to Mr. Caron, and then Mr. McColeman.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** I don't disagree in terms of the problem we're facing right now. I think we're all aware of that. And I agree with Ms. Raitt that the intention is not to delay or change when the budget is tabled. However, it's just as important that we conduct the most meaningful consultations possible in spite of the time constraints we're facing.

I realize that the government has conducted consultations. That's not something new. Mr. Flaherty and Mr. Oliver, of the previous Conservative government, conducted government consultations on the budget, as well. It's a common and logical practice. Those consultations, however, don't replace the consultation process that the Standing Committee on Finance is supposed to carry out.

As I said, I think it's important to hold pre-budget consultations despite the tight timeline we all know is facing the committee. To ensure those consultations are as robust as possible, we need to undertake an intensive process. That's why I suggested two weeks. One week, including the minister's appearance, is still short. Spreading it out over two weeks, with the understanding that the input may not be reflected in the budget because of the deadlines imposed, also strikes me as an acceptable option.

I move that we schedule two weeks of intensive meetings, with the process ending on Thursday, February 25; that the analysts work their usual magic within a time frame that is humanly possible; and that the results then be provided to the committee. Not only will these pre-budget consultations be useful for the coming budget, but they will also give us plenty of financial food for thought in the year ahead.

[English]

**The Chair:** Yes, if that budget is in March—

Sorry, Mr. McColeman, you get the floor.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** It strikes me that we're trying to redesign a process that has traditionally been the work of this committee, so I'll make this attempt to add to the redesign. Three weeks to have a report come back is absolutely a deal-breaker. If we were able to gather evidence and this committee could put it into a fashion that we could pass along to the Minister of Finance, instead of a formal report—and remember, I'm saying this in the context of a complete redesign—would we be allowed, Mr. Chair, to do that as a committee? Is that outside of our purview to suggest that?

Second, if we're not able to, then it may turn out to be a farce—to use a word you used in our discussion—and that's not what we want. None of us wants that. I'm just asking the question. Could we consider the evidence that we gather and package it in a different fashion to get it to the minister in a timely fashion?

**The Chair:** I'll have to ask the clerk or analysts or the Library of Parliament.

• (1215)

**Ms. June Dewetering (Committee Researcher):** I'll jump in.

My name is June Dewetering and I work for the parliamentary information research service, and these two fine fellows are part of the team.

For the benefit of members who haven't served on the committee in the past, in recent years the report has comprised two pieces. The main body of the report, the text, was related to the presentations that were made by witnesses, so it was testimony-based. Over the course of the summer we typically received about 400 briefs from other Canadians, and their input was included in an appendix to the report. We went through all of those and categorized the topic of the briefs into about 24 different categories.

Obviously, the time that it takes to write the report really depends on the number of people who make presentations to the committee. In the past we've taken about three weeks and that's been really pushing it, given the volume of witnesses who have appeared. When we had about 120 witnesses present testimony, three weeks were taken. It's taken less time to look at the briefs and do that categorization that was included in the appendix in prior years.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** That's fine, so thank you for that. You obviously understand the time constraints we have here. Can you come up with a faster way to assimilate the information we get and be able to put it back into the committee's hands so we could then present it to the minister?

**The Chair:** We present the report to Parliament.

**Ms. June Dewetering:** It depends on the number of people who present testimony. In my experience, the more people you hear, the longer it takes to write the report. It depends on the type of report you want. If, for example, people presented testimony and you didn't want that testimony summarized, but wanted it categorized in the way we categorized the 400 briefs in the past, then that takes less time.

**The Chair:** Okay...

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Was that a suggestion? I know it's not your suggestion—you're not making suggestions—but limiting the number of witnesses clearly seems to be the only way to remedy the problem, Mr. McColeman.

**The Chair:** If I can just throw in one other problem. In March, Parliament is only sitting for two weeks. I don't know when the Minister of Finance is going to deliver his budget. But regardless of what the Library of Parliament has done, whether it's the kind of report they've done in the past or a different one, the committee will also have to review it and agree on it as well. We're meeting the weeks of March 7 to March 11 and March 21 to March 24.

After the committee meets and agrees on the report, the Library of Parliament folks have to get that printed, translated—I guess it would have to be translated beforehand—and make the changes. We have to really tighten this up on the front end, I think, to give the ability to do the work on the back end.

When we're back February 16 to February 19, if we were to meet all four days, two three-hour sessions all four days, is that enough?

Mr. Ouellette, and then Mr. McColeman.

**Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette:** For me, it's a problem of here we have this capacity, and we're obviously also having to come out with something that's very credible for Canadians, so it's fantastic that we're going to spend all this effort. But if our report comes out after the budget, all our effort might have gone to waste. If the analysts are writing a report, though I trust them greatly, and if I'm going to put my name on something, I want to make sure that I have the opportunity to review it, that it reflects some of the ways that I think about the economy and its direction.

I think we're getting a little lost in the politics of this, and we need to think more long term. Maybe this is the start of long-term consultations for the next budget about the direction that the finance department should be taking in the long term. Perhaps we could have a small interim report, but I don't think it sounds like something that is possible logistically or is going to give long-term results for anyone around this table. It's not going to offer credibility to the roles of parliamentarians.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Mr. McColeman is next.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** I'll yield to Ms. Raitt.

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** On the same frame as you, Mr. Chair, if you do 24 witnesses, six hours a day, over four days, that's 96 witnesses. But with written briefs, it's not a three-week scenario anymore. If it's categorization only of the issues that have been brought up, perhaps we have a little bit more room for consideration of the report when we come back the week of March 7.

**The Chair:** What will throw our calculations off a little bit is that on the 18th we were hoping we would have a two-hour session with the minister and his staff—an hour with the minister and an hour with officials.

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** That's fine. That drops it down to 89 witnesses.

**The Chair:** Yes.

Is that doable? I mean, we would have to prioritize the witnesses. I think it's doing the best we can do in the circumstances.

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Mr. McColeman.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** Perhaps I can add another thought here.

When the witnesses come, they're on the public record in saying what they have said. If the stumbling block is that report, at least we've done our part in the due diligence of trying to seek information—it's on the public record—on what various stakeholders across this country see as being important to the formulation of the budget.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I think the clerk, or former clerk, has a point to make in terms of briefs.

Go ahead, Ms. Dewetering.

**Ms. June Dewetering:** As you noted, the testimony will be on the public record. The committee has been very successful in the past, largely through Christine, pressuring people to get the transcripts translated in a timely manner, so everything will be translated in fairly short order.

If what you wanted was a categorization of the recommendations, then we could adopt more of the “appendix B” type of approach and just say, for example, “On this particular tax measure, this is what was heard.”

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** Perfect. Beautiful.

**Ms. June Dewetering:** It would be a summary of the recommendations, more or less.

**The Chair:** Ms. O'Connell.

**Ms. Jennifer O'Connell:** Thank you.

I think this is a reasonable compromise. Everybody here wants to do budget consultations in addition to what we're doing locally and in addition to what the Minister of Finance is doing. It's important to note, too, that I think we were all willing to start in December and were not able to form, move forward with this committee, and do pre-budget consultations. As much as this will be taxing in terms of the timing, I think it is important that we do it, that we put this effort in, and that we deal with the fact that we have to take a report that is a little bit different this year. I think the point is also that it will start the focus for next year's budget and future budgets.

I think it's worthwhile to do this, even if it is fewer witnesses than normal years, but those are the restraints we have in an election year. Certainly we had difficulties forming as a committee due to some political issues in the House from the Bloc.

I think this is an important step. It shows Canadians that we all as a committee, parties aside, want to make this process happen. We're committed to doing it even if it will mean a lot of hours in a short amount of time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Liepert.

**Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC):** I just want to get clarity on the timing.

You said it would be a much shorter time frame. If I understand it right, we're talking about just having witnesses for the first week of our two-week sitting. Is it possible to have your work completed by the end of the second week of our sitting?

**Ms. June Dewetering:** It would depend on how quickly we get the translated versions of the transcripts and how long it takes to format the document.

• (1225)

**Mr. Ron Liepert:** But is that a goal we could work towards?

**Ms. June Dewetering:** Absolutely. Goals are always good.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** I would think it would be very tough for that kind of quick turnaround.

But anything is possible; I'm an optimist.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** If I might go back to my business years, let's figure out the worst-case scenario here. What's going to happen if we don't get what we're shooting for? The worst-case scenario, to answer my own question, is that we will have heard the witnesses, they will be on the public record, and there is no report from the committee. At least we'll have done what we could do and put in every effort we could as a committee, and the minister can draw on that information, or not draw on it, as much as he wishes. That's the worst case.

**The Chair:** It would certainly be possible, I think, to have a report by near the end of the first week back in March, which is the 7th to the 11th, I would think.

Go ahead, Mr. Sorbara.

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.):** Obviously, it seems we're dealing with a truncated process from prior committee gatherings. Just to kind of build a consensus on what Jennifer said and what Phil and Lisa have said—I can use first names on the committee?

**The Chair:** Not a problem.

**Mr. Francesco Sorbara:** This is not the House. It seems to me that we do need a credible process, a meaningful process. I do think the idea of, obviously, people coming in and being on the public record is meaningful. If it is a truncated report or a slimmed-down version of a report just because of the cards we've been dealt, I'm fine with that. But it is important that we do some work, as a committee.

If I can use the private sector experience, if I need to be here eight hours, or if I need to be here twelve hours or six hours, I'm ready to do that. We have a week's break next week, our riding week, but we'll come back the Tuesday morning and start the committee's work. I do think the economic conditions warrant it. I think Canadians want us to get down to work as a committee as well. We have had an extensive pre-budget consultation process that's been ongoing. We've heard from our ridings, independent of party, and the finance minister, along with the parliamentary secretary, has been doing great work on that front, but we also need to start the committee process up here. It is truncated unfortunately, but so be it. Let's get down to work.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** I have a question.

**The Chair:** Before I go to the question, Steve, Ms. Raitt mentioned that we wouldn't receive briefs. There have been some briefs already forwarded in. Is it possible for those briefs to be presented on the website, separate from our hearings?

Go ahead.

[Translation]

**The Clerk:** At its last meeting, the committee adopted a motion to undertake the pre-budget consultation process during the summer. The public had until August 7 to submit their briefs. As of August 2, we had received around 50 briefs. After that date, the committee no longer existed, so we couldn't accept any more briefs and had to reject the ones people tried to send us.

As June said, the pre-budget consultation process usually has two components. On the one hand, the committee receives briefs from the public; usually, it's around 400. On the other hand, the committee hears from witnesses that it chooses in light of specific subjects.

So here is the question, Mr. Chair. What do we do with the 50 briefs that are currently in limbo? Does the committee wish to receive those briefs or just invite witnesses?

[English]

**The Chair:** I'll go to Mr. McColeman and then to whomever.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** We were aware that these briefs existed. One thought on this would be to get an immediate letter back to the people who submitted these to ask them if they would like to revise them. It would have to be within a certain time frame—a very fast time frame, obviously—but I think the committee would be wise in accepting those as part of the process here. Because of the change in government and the results of the election, I think they should have an opportunity to revise them if they wish.

•(1230)

**The Chair:** I'll go to Mr. MacKinnon, but what are the implications on the analysts, then, doing their work? They're going to have to analyze each of those briefs, which would be another problem.

Go ahead, Mr. MacKinnon.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Look, it just strikes me that we're trying to do in six or seven committee days what is usually done in six or seven or eight months. Not to reiterate, but this cannot be deemed.... As I think my friend Mr. Ouellette said, we cannot ask Canadians to come before us and then assert that these are the kinds of consultations that this committee has held and will hold again in the future.

Again, let's get down to work as quickly as possible. If we are able to ask these folks if they would like to refresh or somehow modify their submissions, and if it is possible for the committee staff to get working on analyzing those submissions, I know that on this side we'd be happy to receive them. I do think we need to move on here, Mr. Chair, and get our calendars out, get some scheduling done, and then move on with the work.

**The Chair:** Mr. Liepert is next.

I think it's been noted that the briefs could be put on the web, but to simplify the process, given what we're up against, for the

committee's presentation to Parliament we would deal with the witnesses heard at committee. That's just to sum up where we're at.

I'm sorry, Mr. Liepert.

**Mr. Ron Liepert:** I do think, though, that before they go up on the web, the people should be informed, to see if they want them refreshed before they go up on the web.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** Or they can withdraw them or whatever.

**Mr. Ron Liepert:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. I think we can do that. We can issue a news release and ask them to do that. That will be done.

I'll just sum up where we're at, then, to make sure that we're all on the same wavelength. Basically, we're agreed that we would meet on the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th, and the 19th is a Friday; that we would meet for two three-hour sessions each day; and that there would be 12 witnesses per meeting. The exception there would be the two hours on the 18th when, if possible, the Minister of Finance and/or officials would come. I don't know whether Mr. Champagne wants to say anything on this or not. That would be the process.

Parties would need to get their potential witnesses in very quickly. Also, do we decide on that witness list as a steering committee? It could be done by conference call next week or something.

Is that where we're at? Do we have basic agreement on that? I think we can sort it out from there.

Mr. Caron.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy Caron:** I have something to add, but I think everyone will agree. I would just like it specified that our meeting on Thursday with the minister will be televised.

[English]

**The Chair:** Yes, it would be televised as well. I think most finance committee meetings are televised, are they not?

Mr. Liepert.

•(1235)

**Mr. Ron Liepert:** I think we should put a timeline on when these lists get to the subcommittee, because we need to have that decision on the ranking of the witnesses fairly quickly. If we want people to appear as early as the 18th, we have to let them know early next week, I would say. I think we need to add a timeline to get the lists in.

**The Chair:** We're having trouble here with the.... We can't have a conference call. The lists could be sent to the clerk.

You mention it. Go ahead. There is no sense in my interpreting your work.

**Ms. Christine Lafrance:** It was just to say that the way the former finance committee worked was that parties would send their lists to the clerk in a prioritized order, and the clerk would do organized panels proportionately to the weight of the parties in the House. The clerk would submit that list to the chair for approval. Then every time someone declined or accepted, the clerk would go back to the staff of the party to see if he or she wanted us to pursue the list or if she or he wanted someone else.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** We're happy proceeding in that fashion.

**Ms. Christine Lafrance:** Also, everyone was kept informed of things as we were going along, as to who had accepted the invitation or declined the invitation, or whether invitations were outstanding.

**The Chair:** Mr. McColeman.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** I think there was reference to it earlier. Is there a list available of groups from the past years who have been witnesses? Is there something online or anything in the past committee's archives that we could access just to see who the groups are that have been witnesses?

**The Clerk:** On the website there's no list per se, but in the reports from past years you have all the organizations that have appeared, and all the organizations and individuals who have submitted briefs. The meetings are categorized by study on the committee's website as well.

**Mr. Phil McColeman:** Great, thank you.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon:** I have one very last point, I promise. I do think we want to stress with potential witnesses that we are in a compressed time situation, and that if they could remain focused on issues pertaining to the upcoming budget, tax measures, or what

have you, without unduly burdening them with constraints, I think that would be helpful for us all.

**The Chair:** Parties should have their lists to the clerk no later than February 8, Monday, at 5 p.m.

**Mr. Raj Grewal:** Mr. Chair, are we still looking at 89 witnesses in total?

**The Chair:** We are, roughly.

**Mr. Raj Grewal:** That's it roughly, give or take, and it's six witnesses per three-hour session.

**The Chair:** It's 12.

**Mr. Raj Grewal:** Twelve witnesses per three-hour session, so it's 24 witnesses a day. Perfect.

**The Chair:** That's except for the day the minister's here.

Okay, I think we're basically all on the same wavelength. I'll just state again that parties should have their lists to the clerk no later than 5 p.m. on February 8, and they'll be prioritized as was laid out.

The meeting is adjourned.

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