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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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• (1250)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): Welcome back to the 139th meeting. We just want to close up on a few informal and hopefully fun things for the last words in the year 2018.

One is that the committee is excited and should be complimented that, because of its work, indigenous languages have started to be used officially in the House. On page 24,766 of the Commons Debates, the Honourable Hunter Tootoo, member for Nunavut, made a short statement in Inuktitut that's in Hansard in the symbols of Inuktitut. That's the first time. It's great to have that on the record.

Also, while we're doing closing Christmas statements, I want to apologize to Mr. Reid, who suggested a few weeks ago—which I totally agreed with and wanted to do—that we have another one of our informal dinners to discuss the future of the committee. Unfortunately, I never organized it. As I said when I came to Parliament at the beginning, my bias is to actually accomplish things, and I think those types of meetings lead us to think about concrete achievements that we can do, like the item I just mentioned. We have a lot of talent on this committee.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): With that in mind, the next opportunity we'll have to do this would be in the new year and in the new House. There is a restaurant there. Am I right?

The Chair: Yes. It's smaller, one third the size, but yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, but it's big enough for us, especially if we get a reservation in early. Thinking of that, if it's agreeable to members, why don't we consider having an informal meeting of the members? We're back on the Monday, I assume. Would the Tuesday night be...?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Or we could have an informal luncheon at our old committee spot that Thursday.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): We should probably do it before the debate about this document, or everyone may not be there.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Reid: Or after, I suppose....

Mr. David Christopherson: Maybe both: one at the front and one at the back....

The Chair: Let's leave it a little flexible, but I'll try to organize something.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. It would be really a super idea, I think.

If I might say this, just as a thought, what I had in mind was this. As we approach the end of a parliamentary term—it's a fairly predictable ending time—we could find our agenda jammed up with material that is hard to get through entirely. Alternatively, we could find ourselves with unexpected amounts of free space, which could be used for some items that are not on the public's radar screen. We could do some useful low-key work there that is probably achievable by means of consensus, but sometimes some prep work is required, and if we haven't thought about that in advance, we might miss our chance. That's really where I think the kind of business that could be discussed at that meeting might go.

The Chair: Just to throw some totally irrelevant information into the situation using my prerogative as chair—this will be discussed at the dinner—I've mentioned before that all the northern nations in the world now have electronic voting in their parliaments as an option. I learned this morning from the clerk that they've checked the United States. Of the 100 legislatures in the United States, something in the order of 90 out of 100 have electronic voting.

Mr. Scott Reid: Is that the upper or the lower Houses in all the states?

The Chair: It's lower and upper.

Mr. Christopherson, go ahead.

• (1255)

Mr. David Christopherson: I'd like to build on Mr. Reid's idea.

Again, it stems from Mr. Simms' comments at our previous meeting about Centre Block and that whole second chamber idea. That has to start somewhere. Right now it's in the past. We refer to discussions we had about it and the interest that some of us had in seeing that as a welcome addition, possibly, to our current parliamentary process. Maybe in the times that Mr. Reid is identifying, this could be one of the things that we start doing, some of that work to help inform the next Parliament, which will be tasked with making some decisions about what will happen with the temporary chamber we're about to move into.

To repeat myself, it makes that discussion current. Even if we just issued a report that said we've talked about it and here are some thoughts, that would put it on the political radar and it would be there so it wouldn't get lost. I really think that's probably one of the biggest potential changes that could find agreement, in my humble opinion, in future parliaments. There could be room for that kind of a major reform, which would be significant. They would only do it if it was possible, and we've talked about the benefits of it. We haven't looked at all the pitfalls, which there are bound to be, too.

All of that is to say that I like Mr. Reid's idea, and if we have time, let's do some work that otherwise we wouldn't have the opportunity to do. We're all that much more experienced now at the end of this Parliament. For some people, it's the end of their first parliament. For others, it's polishing up after a number of parliaments. We're all stronger and, I'd like to think, smarter and more experienced now. It's that kind of a discussion. It's non-partisan and shouldn't, in any way, affect the silly season that we're going to be in as we get into the pre-election time. All that is to add my voice that maybe that is one of those unique ideas or special ideas we could look at that would be planting a seed for future parliaments. It would be to talk about that second chamber and how we might be able to advance opportunities for, especially, private members to have more time, more say, and more priority.

Thanks.

The Chair: I'll take that advice and that input, not only to the dinner for this committee but also to the subcommittee on agenda.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes.

The Chair: I just want to go around the table before we leave, because it's Christmas.

Mr. Nater and I already made some closing comments. I'll go around if anyone else wants to say anything, not only to wrap up this year but to wrap up the three years we've had together. We've never done that, so if anyone wants to make any comments, go ahead.

I did have a suggested motion that we see the clock at June, but I won't follow up on that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We'll start with Stephanie, and then anyone who wants to make any closing remarks before the holidays.

Stephanie, go ahead.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Merry Christmas. Happy new year. Happy Hanukkah. Happy Kwanza.

See you next year.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, go ahead.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm already looking forward to our dinner in the new year. Actually, I'm quite excited that the first experience of the new restaurant will be in the company of you guys. That will be nice.

The Chair: Is there anything else?

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'll just repeat my earlier comments that I made in camera.

Thank you for your leadership on this committee and the flexibility that you've shown to this committee over the past year that I've been on it, or barely a year. I appreciate that.

I appreciate working with the members of this committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, go ahead.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks, Chair.

First off, of course, I want to wish everyone a happy and safe holiday.

I'm probably a bit more emotional than most because I love this room and I love this committee. Some of the finest parliamentarians who have served have been on this committee. I love the non-partisan nature of what we do. I've been around so long now that I have no interest at all in getting a headline because I took a political shot at somebody. That holds no stimulation at all anymore.

What excites me, at the end of almost 35 years in elected office, happens when from our disparate positions we actually work together for a common cause and find compromises and common ground so we can issue reports and recommendations that we all agree on. I find that stimulating. I find that exciting.

A lot of that has happened in this room, because this is the only committee that has exactly the same time period. We don't move. We always meet at the same time, and we meet in the same room, except when we're doing big, big things, when we go to the big rooms. I guess it's about the intimacy of the room. This is one of the smallest rooms.

I'm being a little scattered, but that's just the effect of the emotions. On a personal note, 2018 has been the most tragic year of my life personally, combined with some exciting things, so there are a lot of mixed emotions.

Anyway, on a selfish note, I was mentioning to my wife the other day that I feel quite honoured that when I leave this place the emotions I feel will be shared by everyone, because you're all going through that now as we leave this building and move on. It's kind of nice that there's that shared emotion of "goodbye" to our parliamentary home for a while, rather than just one lone member not running again and having that feeling of "Gee, I'll never be back here." There's safety in numbers. I kind of like that.

I just want to mention, too, if I may, while I have the floor, that on the issue of aboriginal languages what's really exciting, too, is that when our successors or some of you return to this place when it reopens, that won't be a big deal. It will be just the way we do business. Isn't that beautiful, to be part of something new that needs to be done to strengthen the Confederation and knowing, the way this place operates and the way Canadians are, that a decade or so hence it's not going to be a big deal but just the way we do things? There are so many areas of positiveness in which this Parliament plays a role, even on the international stage.

I'll wrap up, or I'll just keep going on forever, but I just want to say how much I get out of being in these meetings and how much respect I have for all of you and for the amazing staff we have who let us do this. I'm looking around the room at all the staff, including the security people who are outside, ready to take a bullet for us if they need to, and that's not an exaggeration for those of us who were here in 2014.

Special thanks to you, Chair. You've been an outstanding chair. You have a very unique approach to chairing that is very effective. Mr. Preston was like that. You felt that shadow as you took the chair because Mr. Preston was so widely regarded, but I can say, having served with him, that you have met that standard as best you can and exceeded it even. It has been a real honour to serve on a committee with you at the helm.

I wish you all a happy holiday.

Thanks.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you, David.

Before I forget, I also want to congratulate our staff, as you have. It was in my notes to do that. I think we actually have the best clerk and researchers of all the committees.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: They have really kept us out of trouble—that's for sure—and they always have the answers we need. Also, we get the stuff in advance, so it doesn't lead to a lot of wasted time in committee, because the answers are already there. We really appreciate that.

We also appreciate that we have the best food of any committee.

Mr. Bittle, go ahead.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Thank you so much.

It's tough to follow David after such an eloquent response, so on what is possibly my final intervention in this place, I simply want to say thank you and merry Christmas to all of you, and all the best and much happiness in 2019.

The Chair: Madame Lapointe, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): I obviously agree with all these glowing comments. We're certainly leaving this place with some nostalgia.

I want to thank everyone. I want to wish you a merry Christmas and happy holidays. I hope that you have a beautiful, healthy and peaceful 2019. Continue to hope that we'll find peace and work hard.

I want to thank you all for always being here to help us. I really enjoyed being here with you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, go ahead.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thanks.

I thought this was kind of silly at the beginning, but now, halfway through, I'm like, "Oh, it's so wonderful that we're doing this."

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'm glad we have the opportunity to share our thoughts. It has been quite emotional to be leaving this building, even though I've only been here three years; I can't imagine what it's like for those who have been here for years and decades before me. This building has a lot of history. It will be nice to see it restored and see it get the love and care it probably needs. I think that's the positive part of it. I just wish it weren't closed for so long.

I look forward to the new year and working with all of you in the new building, in West Block.

This committee was also something unexpected for me. When I was first appointed to it three years ago, I thought, "Wow. What did I do to deserve this?" Now I say, "Wow! What did I really do to deserve this?"

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think it's been fantastic. It's been a great learning experience. Working with all of you has been the best part.

Thank you. Merry Christmas.

The Chair: David, go ahead.

• (1305)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: David, in our very first interaction at this committee, at the very beginning of the first Parliament, you made some derisive comment that the rookies had no experience in this place. I asked you then if you meant to tell me that Tyler had no experience—because I'd sat next to him for a long time—and you got upset at me. So our relationship didn't start off very well.

But it's been a huge privilege for me to sit with really interesting people. We've built really good bonds on this committee. I think that's not overstating it.

Scott, I love saying this: I used to watch you on TV, and it's fun to work with you—David, a little less.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: More fun to work, a little less on TV....

I love this committee. It's a lot of fun. It's one that has no value in the riding, none. Nobody in the riding gives a flying F what we do at PROC, but it is the most fascinating work you can do on the Hill. This is where we see what's going on.

That reminds me that we have a lot of unresolved issues, as we learned on Tuesday, with the reconstruction of this place. I'm really hoping we stay on top of that and come back to it a couple of times a year. Where are we at? Where are we going? Is it where we want to be going? The PPS is another really fascinating one. I never thought we'd be dealing with it the way we have been for the last three years. I hope we don't drop that bone either.

All of that is to say that it's been a lot of fun working with you. This is probably the last committee meeting to take place in this room as we know it, possibly ever. Who knows what it will look like when we come back? It might be the bar—again, we don't know.

Thank you. Happy holidays, and we'll see you at lunch in West Block.

The Chair: Just before I go to Mr. Simms, I want to follow up on one of your comments.

I definitely intend to have another meeting like Tuesday's before this Parliament is over. We will not leave it until the next Parliament. It's very important; MPs want their input. I think you made that point clear. We have to make sure we stay on top of that.

Mr. Simms, go ahead.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): My name is Scott. I'm a Leo.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Simms: You know, there are people around us here, and I mean literally around us, whom I think we should thank as well. They're the people who sit behind us. They put on a brave face when we say something stupid, and they are delighted when we say something smart. Either way, usually the smart stuff comes from them, and usually the stupid stuff comes from my knee-jerk reactions, more than anything else.

Thank you, staff, for doing that. I say that with the utmost reverence toward staff, because they're the blocks that support us.

To my current staff, Courtney, thank you.

To my former staff, David, thank you.

The fact that he's still sitting here blows my mind. It blows everyone's mind, I guess.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Your turn is coming.

Mr. Scott Simms: I came here with David in 2004, and there was a steep learning curve. Thanks to people like David Christopherson, that learning curve smoothed itself out after a while.

I say that collectively, for the entire class of 2004, including the former Speaker and current leader of the Conservative Party. He and I have had some great conversations. I learned from him as much as anybody else who came in then. I came in with no political experience. People like Mr. Christopherson had that experience.

I won't repeat the eloquence you just put out there, because I'd just do it an injustice, so I'll leave it at that. Thank you, David, for your kind words.

Thank you, everybody. Merry Festivus to everybody.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: David, go ahead.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Talking about things that we have to deal with, from the very first meeting I said that I wanted the people at the mikes to have name tags. I really hope we can deal with this before the next Parliament, so that Andrew, Andre and Michaela have name tags. Any clerks and analysts who are here and can be in Hansard should be identifiable to members at the table. That's very important to me.

You guys are part of the committee. You're not elected members, but without you, this committee goes no place.

I think it's important that we ultimately deal with that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Following up on that, do the researchers want to...?

Mr. Andre Barnes (Committee Researcher): We're good. Thank you, though.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, go ahead.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Lauzon): I think maybe I can speak for Andre and Michaela as well and say that we have tremendous respect for all of you. We're happy to help out however we can. It's a very enjoyable experience for us to work on this committee.

Merry Christmas.

The Chair: Thank you.

Finally, as we're allowed to have witnesses, I'm wondering if the people who may have been here the longest have any comments.

Mel, Tyler, or Kelly, you could set a precedent and actually speak.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1310)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Let the record show that Tyler's turning red.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: No?

A voice: No. I'm good. Thank you.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Can that go on the record?

An hon. member: That sounds like "Wrap it up."

The Chair: Thank you, all.

I have an appreciation for everyone. It's a great committee. Everyone worked together on some difficult issues that you wouldn't imagine you could come to a compromise on. I really appreciate all your work. Hopefully, we can accomplish something, with so much talent, in the next six months.

Thank you and merry Christmas.

We are adjourned.

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