



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs**

---

PROC • NUMBER 001 • 1st SESSION • 43rd PARLIAMENT

---

EVIDENCE

**Thursday, January 30, 2020**

—  
**Chair**

**Ms. Ruby Sahota**



## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Thursday, January 30, 2020

• (1100)

[*English*]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive):** 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, entertain points of order or participate in debate. We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

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

[*Translation*]

I am ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Gerretsen has the floor.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** I move Ruby Sahota as the chair.

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Mr. Gerretsen that Ms. Sahota be elected chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

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

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried and Ms. Sahota duly elected.

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

[*English*]

I invite Ms. Sahota to take her place at the head of the table.

**The Chair (Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.)):** Good morning, everyone. Thank you for putting your confidence in me to chair this committee. It was a pleasure for me to sit on this committee for four years, in the last Parliament. I'm really honoured to have the privilege of chairing this committee, and I will try to do the best job possible.

I believe we can move to the election of the vice-chairs. The clerk will preside over the election of the vice-chairs.

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

Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** I move Mr. Richards as the first vice-chair.

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Mr. Brassard that Mr. Richards be elected as first vice-chair of the committee. Are there any other motions?

[*Translation*]

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

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried and Mr. Richards duly elected first vice-chair.

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

**The Clerk:** Pursuant to Standing Order 102(6), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition party.

I am now ready to receive motions for the election of the second vice-chair.

[*English*]

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** I would like to nominate Alain Therrien for the second vice-chair.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk:** It has been proposed by Mr. Turnbull that Mr. Therrien be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

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

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried and Mr. Therrien duly elected second vice-chair.

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

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mark, go ahead.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Madam Chair, I would offer the following motion by consent of the committee, given the format that previous committees have been taking, such as the Canada-China committee:

That the Committee report the following recommendation to the House: That for the remainder of the 43rd parliament that Standing Order 106(2) be amended by (i) replacing the word “two”, with the word “three”, (ii) replacing each occurrence of the words “, and the second vice-chair shall be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition party”, with the words “the second vice-chair and the third vice-chair shall consist of one member of the second opposition party and one member of the third opposition party”.

**The Chair:** Okay. Is there any—

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I offer that by consent.

**The Chair:** Since we've just received this motion, we don't have copies to hand out to everybody. Essentially, the motion calls for, instead of our standard two vice-chairs, a third vice-chair from the other party represented here, the NDP. Does anyone have anything to state on the matter?

Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just as a point, the document we've received is solely in English and is not translated. I question whether the motion is in order at this point, because of the fact that it's not translated.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I apologize if it came off as a.... I was submitting the motion with the intent.... I did not even think that I was going to be submitting the physical motion because I was just asking for consent from the committee for it, like we would normally ask for consent from the committee for something.

I didn't intend it to be.... I'm sorry. I didn't even know you were going to ask me for it. I was just putting it out there verbally, thinking that the committee would accept consent of that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC):** Just to get some clarification here, are you moving a motion? Is a motion being moved here, or are we being asked for unanimous consent?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I'm asking for unanimous consent, yes.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen is asking for unanimous consent.

He has read it out and we do have simultaneous translation. What I can do is read it out again and try to go as slowly as possible. If at the end of that we do have unanimous consent, we can go from there.

Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Just as a clarification through you, Madam Chair, to Mr. Gerretsen, is he asking for consent because the convention around here is to ask for consent? We need clarification on what specifically he is trying to do here.

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

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am putting forward a motion asking for unanimous consent from the floor, as opposed to.... I'm putting forward this motion for unanimous consent of the committee. I apologize that I didn't provide it in advance. The committee hadn't officially been formed, with a chair, until moments ago, so it would have been more difficult to do that.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Can I ask for further clarification on that?

Obviously, in the last Parliament it was a fairly well-established precedent in this committee—and you would remember this, Madam Chair, having been on the committee through this as well—that we would change Standing Orders only by unanimous consent.

Is that the reason Mr. Gerretsen is putting this forward? Is it because of that established precedent that he is seeking unanimous consent to follow that? What is the purpose of the unanimous consent?

• (1110)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I put forward the motion hoping that we could get unanimous—

**The Chair:** Just a minute—

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Sorry.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have a wonderful clerk already.

As we want to make sure that the ground rules we lay are very clear on this committee, I can understand why clarification is being sought on the matter.

My understanding at this point is that Mr. Gerretsen just intends to move this motion, since it is our first meeting, at this point. It's not the regular precedent that would be used, with the notice, but he is just moving this from the floor.

If there is debate on the matter... I know Mr. Richards is bringing up the unanimous consent issue, which is something we discussed in the last Parliament. This is a new Parliament, so this committee is free to decide how it moves on that matter.

At this point, what I suggest is that the motion has been moved. I will read the motion slowly into the record again. We have the translation, and at that point, we can start discussing the motion once it's been moved.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** On a point of order, what I was trying to understand or seek was some clarification as to how you would see the procedure working here, and I appreciate your efforts to give clarification. Obviously Mr. Gerretsen indicated that he was moving this by consent, which would indicate that it's something other than just putting a motion forward. My assumption is that he was doing so based on the precedent that we set in the last Parliament, that Standing Orders would be changed only by consent. I'm just trying to get clarification from him as to the reason he is moving it that way. Is that, in fact, the reason—the precedent that we change the Standing Orders only by consent, or...?

I am asking, through you, if you can ask Mr. Gerretsen to give us some clarification on the reason he has moved it in such a way.

**The Chair:** I will ask what the intention was. I think we all became used to certain practices in the last Parliament, but I just want to remind the committee that at this point we can move forward with a practice that we wish to adopt in this committee.

I will give Mr. Gerretsen the floor if he would like to clarify.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I was not going off anything that happened in the previous session of Parliament. I was just observant of the fact that in the Canada-China committee the opportunity to have a third vice-chair was extended.

Perhaps the manner in which I presented it came across as very formal. I didn't really think it would take this long. I said "unanimous consent" because I thought that would just deal with it very quickly. That's the only reason I used that term. I'll leave it at that.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

From my standpoint, I see significant issues with what Mr. Gerretsen is proposing, and I think there is a differentiation to be made. I know he has referenced the Canada-China committee a couple of times, but the Canada-China committee is a special committee of the House. It was fully constituted by the House of Commons. It's not a standing committee of the House.

What Mr. Gerretsen is proposing here is to make changes to the Standing Orders on how the committee structures are made.

As I recall, in the last Parliament I sat in a couple of those meetings, where Mr. Christopherson—

• (1115)

**Mr. Blake Richards:** On a point of order, Madam Chair—sorry, Mr. Brassard—it seems as though we are now moving into debate, and I wanted to get some clarification from you as to what your ruling, in fact, was. Obviously Mr. Gerretsen moved this, asking for it to be done by consent. Is your ruling, then, that we are now entertaining this as a motion and it's up for debate, or are you planning to ask for consent?

**The Chair:** I believe Mr. Tochor is on the list as well.

My intention is to try to read this into the record so that we can then entertain debate on the matter, but I will allow your colleagues to finish their thoughts at this point.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Before we do that, I just want to clarify that what you're suggesting is that you're making the ruling that this will be brought forward as a motion rather than asking that it be done by consent. Is that what you're doing here?

**The Chair:** As a motion, yes, that's correct.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That didn't seem to be the wish of Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I may have missed that.

**The Chair:** What Mr. Richards is asking about and what my ruling is leaning towards is that I will introduce this as a motion at this point, and not for consent, and then we can debate it. Was that your intention?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** That was not my intention. My intention was just to put something forward that I thought we could move by consent without debate. I'll have to withdraw based on that.

**The Chair:** Are you withdrawing it?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Yes. I put that on the floor to be moved by unanimous consent. I thought we would just consent to it and

move on. I'll have to withdraw. If the motion comes up later, then we'll debate it at that time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Tochor.

**Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC):** If it's withdrawn, there's nothing to debate.

**The Chair:** Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** First of all, I just want to say that I think this is an important conversation. Canadians across this country elected a minority government with three opposition parties. As we move forward, it's important to respect the fact that this is how Canadians voted. The Conservatives led us off well by presenting their motion in the House of Commons, which was voted for by the opposition parties and not the governing party, to have a committee that had three vice-chairs.

As we move forward, it's important that PROC have that conversation because this could become something negative, where we have some second opposition parties getting elected in some committees and not in others. That's not what we're here for. As a minority government we're here to work together and collaborate.

I have a motion that has been translated that I would like to present. Hopefully this is in order. I know we don't have our routine orders yet, so thank you for your support. I will be reading it out in English because my French is not very strong, but I hope everybody sees that the French is here. This motion reads as follows:

That the Committee report the following recommendation to the House: That for the remainder of the 43rd parliament, that notwithstanding Standing Order 106(2), in addition to the Chair and first vice-chair, there be one vice-chair from the Bloc Québécois and one vice-chair from the New Democratic Party for all committees listed under Standing Order 104.

This is the motion I am tabling. I hope we will have a robust discussion about this. For me it's really about encouraging a House of Commons that reflects the Canadian election results and collaboration among the parties to get things done for Canadians.

Thank you.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I would like to ask for a ruling from you, Chair, as to whether this motion would be in order.

This I believe would go beyond the mandate of this committee. What we're talking about here would be effectively a change to the Standing Orders. It doesn't actually call for it to be that. Mr. Gerretsen of course was asking for consent to change the Standing Orders with what he moved. He was doing that by asking for consent, which has been the established precedent here. In order to make that change, that would be the requirement, but also we're expected to operate under the Standing Orders, which are set forward by the House. This is asking for us to operate outside of those Standing Orders. You might find this motion would not be in order.

**The Chair:** I want to thank Ms. Blaney for the motion that she has moved. I do find that a change to the Standing Orders would be within the mandate of this committee. Having been a senior member on this committee, I know this is very much the type of issue we look at here. If that is Ms. Blaney's wish, and that's what it seems to be from the motion here, we would then have a debate and ultimately a vote on the motion, and then it would be presented in the House.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Can I get a clarification on that? It doesn't actually indicate that she is proposing a change to the Standing Orders. It sounds to me as though you've ruled that she is changing the Standing Orders. She's saying, "notwithstanding", but she is not actually calling for a change to the Standing Orders.

**The Chair:** Okay, Mr. Richards. The clerk here actually has quite a lot of experience in the matter. I haven't been able to look into it myself that much. Upon the advice of the clerk, if this were moved and adopted here, it would then be reported to the House and voted on, and essentially the effect it would have would be a change, for this Parliament, of the Standing Orders.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Can I seek some further clarification on that, then?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** On a point of order—

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sorry, Madam Chair, but we're still on the point of order I raised.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** No. You're arguing your point of order right now.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Well, I'm asking for further clarification on the point.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Well, the chair made a ruling. You can challenge the chair if you want.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** No, I'm not challenging the chair; I'm asking for a clarification of the ruling. We don't have a final ruling until it's clarified so that all members are able to understand it. I'm seeking clarification of that ruling.

**The Chair:** Since you have the floor, Mr. Richards, I'll let you continue with your clarification, and then I'll move back to you, Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that, because it is important that we all understand what the ruling in fact is for it to be a ruling.

I've lost my train of thought here. Give me a second to re-compose that.

What I guess I'm trying to understand, then, is that if it's been reported back to the House, it would then be considered a change to the Standing Orders for this Parliament. Would that then have an impact upon all other committees?

**The Chair:** Yes, I believe so.

Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I just wanted to get us back on track. You made a ruling, Madam Chair. Let's move on or challenge the chair.

**The Chair:** I think we're on track. On that note—

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Ms. Blaney had the floor when the point of order came up, if I remember correctly.

**The Chair:** Ms. Blaney is not here.

Mr. Brassard.

**Mr. John Brassard:** I think I was also on the list.

**The Chair:** You can get back on the list.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I was on the list to begin with, was I not? I moved a point of order. I didn't give up my spot on the list to do that.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Well, it's a motion, and now we can debate the motion, right?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.):** On a point of order, Madam Chair, since Ms. Blaney is not here, can we maybe suspend for a bit till she comes back?

**The Chair:** Would everyone agree to take a recess for a few minutes?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I just want to be clear, though, that I was next on the list.

**The Chair:** You are. You are on the list.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'm not concerned about that. I just wanted to make sure that I didn't drop off the list. It was a point of order I moved. I didn't want to give up my spot to do that.

Thank you.

● (1125)

**The Chair:** At this point, it seems there is consent from everyone to have a quick recess.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay.

● (1125)

(Pause)

● (1145)

**The Chair:** I call the committee back to order. I hope everyone has had an opportunity to have some fruitful discussion on the motion brought forward by Ms. Blaney.

I believe we all know that there are some routine motions we want to get to today as well. Some of them are very important for the functioning of other committees and the House. I want to have fulsome discussion on this, so we'll give it some time, but I want it to be on your mind that we do need to get to those at some point if possible.

I believe Ms. Blaney had the floor, so first it's Ms. Blaney, and then we'll go to Mr. Richards.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much, Chair. In the last opportunity I had to speak, I forgot to congratulate you on being appointed chair. I wanted to make sure to do that. Again, I apologize for having to leave the room and have some discussions.

At the end of the day, this is an important motion for me and for all of Parliament, I believe. We were very careful in the drafting of this motion to make sure that it doesn't change the Standing Orders. It really looks at the reality of this current Parliament and is respecting, really, the work the Conservatives did in their Canada-China motion. This is a motion that just allows for a role for all the official parties in the committees to do the important work they have to do. This is about making sure there's an equal voice and giving an opportunity for all voices to be heard.

Again, I want to reiterate that this is really about this specific Parliament; that's why we worded the motion.... I hope that people can move forward and support this motion so we can get to the important work that needs to be done to begin the committees in this House, which are waiting anxiously to do the important work before them.

● (1150)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

Obviously, at this committee, essentially a senior committee of Parliament, what we do has some impact that ripples down. That's already been made pretty clear. I believe both finance and trade met yesterday and had a discussion about something similar. The decision made at those committees was to wait and see what occurred here at PROC. That quite clearly demonstrates the impact. It affects all of the committees. That's well known.

Given that, I was only made aware of this proposal this morning, and I would assume that many of my colleagues on other committees are not aware of it at this point. We are talking about something that effectively, as the chair has ruled, will change the Standing Orders, at least for this Parliament. It is a very serious thing to change the Standing Orders.

As you may recall, in the last Parliament you and I both sat here for a meeting that lasted for six weeks. It was because there was a proposal to change the Standing Orders, and it was being done without the consent of all parties and all members. On that very fundamental principle we held quite firm. From there on out through that Parliament, that was sort of how things operated, that changes to the Standing Orders would be done with the consent of all parties. What's being proposed here is that we do something different. Given that, it's not something I am prepared to make a decision about today. I think all members of my caucus need to have an opportunity to be consulted. I would hope that other parties would feel the same way and extend that same right to the members of their caucuses. That opportunity needs to occur. It impacts all of those members. It impacts the members on other committees as well. In order to do that, that's what would need to happen.

Obviously, it's not going to happen in the next hour and five minutes. I'll make it really clear now that there will not be a decision made on this today. We will do what's necessary to make sure that occurs. Some conversations need to occur, and those will occur one way or the other. Members here can choose. I will be making a motion to adjourn on it. I am not doing that now, but I will be doing that. I just want everyone to know that now, so that they can give

some thought to it. I will be moving a motion to adjourn the debate. That's what I'll be doing.

The reason I'll be doing that is that, as you have indicated, some routine motions need to be dealt with. I think they should be dealt with today. In order to do that, this will have to be disposed of one way or the other. That's why I will be proposing to deal with it in that manner, so that we can move to those routine motions. Again, that then impacts what will happen at other committees. I don't want to see that delayed. If members choose not to allow the debate on this to be adjourned, that's what will happen, unfortunately. I don't want to see that, but it will be the only option left and that's what will occur.

I really believe, and I appeal in good faith to everyone here, that obviously this does, as I have indicated, have that impact on all other committees. Therefore, that conversation should happen, and I know it will happen. One way or the other, it will happen. If people will entertain the idea of adjourning debate on this motion, we can deal with the other things that are important to get other committees up and running. I think it's critical that we do that. Then those conversations can take place. The outcome will be whatever the outcome is, but the outcome will be determined after the opportunity for all members and all parties to have some say. I would hope that as members of this committee, which is essentially the custodian and guardian of Parliament and the rules that govern this place and the order of this place, we would all understand that this is a critical thing that occurs in order for those kinds of changes to be made, and would therefore allow those conversations to happen.

● (1155)

I won't even get into, at this point anyway, my thoughts on the motion itself. I do have some thoughts, but again, I think others should have that opportunity. It impacts all the members of this Parliament, so all parties should have that say-so.

I'll ask now that I put my name back on the bottom of the speakers list. If the decision is made to carry on with this, I want to make some comments on the motion itself.

Given what I've just said and the fact that we really do need to deal with those other routine motions so that things can get up and running, I move that we adjourn debate on this motion.

**The Chair:** All right.

Shall debate be adjourned? Perhaps I can have a show of hands.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Can we have a recorded vote, Chair?

**The Chair:** We can have a recorded vote.

This is just to end debate on the motion on this matter. Everyone understands that, right?

(Motion negated: nays 7; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** The motion was defeated. Debate will continue.

I believe Mr. Brassard is next on the list.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a wonderful day in the neighbourhood, as Mr. Rogers would say—the other Mr. Rogers.

I know the motion speaks specifically to this 43rd Parliament, but I also recall in the last Parliament how this committee was seized with the issue of the changes to the Standing Orders. In fact, if I recall, it went on for several months. Due to the legacy of Mr. Christopherson, who spent a tremendous amount of time standing up for the rules of this institution, it's important that all of us really understand what the issue here is. It is that to change the Standing Orders in this regard is unconventional, to say the least.

I understand Ms. Blaney's argument on this. I understand the value of the work that goes into these committees, certainly the work of the chair and the vice-chairs, and the subcommittees as well. In fact, I would argue that the NDP does have a position and does have a standing on the subcommittee and can play a key role in the direction of this committee. Oftentimes today it's been referenced that the China-Canada committee did something very similar to what is being proposed here, but the reality is that it was a committee that was set out by a vote of Parliament. It's not a standing committee. The standing committee rules are very clear on how the vice-chairs are selected. To use that as a suggestion that somehow we change the entire rules....

I mean, they're not just the rules for this committee. It's every single committee that is constituted by Parliament as a standing committee. This change Ms. Blaney is proposing, if supported, will have a cascading effect right down the line for all of the committees.

I'll use the example of yesterday in the health committee and the vote for the vice-chairs. Certainly I understand the responsibility of PROC to deal with these changes in the House, but the health committee yesterday utilized a provision, which they're allowed to do under the Standing Orders, to hold a vote, a secret vote. Perhaps I can get clarification from the clerk as well a little later. They held a secret vote in which—maybe I stand to be corrected—I believe an NDP member was selected as the vice-chair in addition to a Conservative member. Every committee that is constituted as a standing committee of Parliament has the option to do that.

Why we're proposing, why we would even entertain any thought of a proposal to change the Standing Orders to allow a third vice-chair, when in fact if a member of the third party wants to run as a vice-chair of a standing committee, they can do what we all do.... Put your name forward and formulate an argument as to why you should be the vice-chair. In a situation like Mr. Davies', for example, he has a tremendous amount of institutional knowledge on the health file. The members of the committee, at that point, deemed that he was the right choice, by secret ballot, to become the vice-chair. Why we're moving away from that and the opportunity that every single committee has....

It's going to take a lot more convincing for members of this committee to change my mind that this is not an option, because it is for members of the committee.

• (1200)

To draw the comparison that Canada-China is somehow similar to a standing committee of Parliament.... I think you're cherry-picking at that point. I think you're utilizing that argument to support and prop up an argument that the standing order should be made in this manner, and I truly believe that it's not a good comparison,

quite frankly. That was a special committee of Parliament. It was voted on by Parliament. Parliament decided, and the committee, within its own structure as constituted by Parliament, determined that was the way to go. This is much different from that, Madam Chair.

The other thing I would suggest as well is this. We're not going to move the motion today. We will likely put a notice of motion on the table for the consideration of this committee that I believe will open up accountability and transparency within this Parliament. It will be up to this committee to decide that.

We've proven over the last several sessions of House sittings, with two opposition day motions that have received consent and were voted on as appropriate by the opposition parties, that we really truly hold the government to account. On the motion we're going to propose and put on notice, if anybody votes against that, I think it would call into question the ability of the individuals and parties to really hold the government to being accountable and transparent. I want that to be considered as we look at this motion, because transparency and accountability are fundamental to the institution of Parliament and how we operate.

This motion.... Again, on the principle of changing the Standing Orders, we're not going to lose sight of the fact that this does create a bump-up in pay for those members. I believe it's \$6,200 a year. All 24 committees will receive that \$6,200 a year. While we have to be aware and cognizant of the fact that we are accountable to taxpayers for that money, the principle of the fact that we are fundamentally changing the manner in which the Standing Orders are constituted and are proposed to be changed here is what really is my position on this.

The convention around this place is that we've agreed to the Standing Orders. They haven't been unilaterally imposed on us, and there's a reason for that, so it's that convention alone that causes me to pause to consider what we're doing here. If this happens, then what's next? I think it's a valid concern on the part of all parliamentarians, certainly the members who sit around this committee table, to consider the consequence of changing the Standing Orders in the manner in which that's being proposed today.

I really want us to consider this. I was hoping that Mr. Richards' motion to adjourn the debate on this would really cause this to be kicked up the chain, if you will, so that the leadership team of the Houses could discuss what the implications are with respect to this motion and how it goes against the very convention by which these types of decisions have been made in the past.

While I'm disappointed that the motion to adjourn debate wasn't passed, I still want to see us operate in a spirit of co-operation, and the Standing Orders have always.... I've only been here since 2015, as some of us around this table have, but the convention of this place is that the Standing Orders, and certainly any proposed changes to the Standing Orders, must be and have always been agreed to by parties.



• (1205)

I'll go back to my point earlier about Mr. Christopherson and other members of the PROC committee who sat around this table sometimes for hours upon hours during the day doing the work, but also defending the institution and defending those conventions. While we appreciate the understanding and the work that certainly NDP members do on the committees, we also very greatly respect the institution and the convention by which these decisions are made.

I may have more to say about this going forward, depending on how this debate plays out, but I do want to say that I will need a lot more convincing to change my mind on this issue. I hope that members of this committee really understand the implications of this, not just of this change, but also, as we go forward, of the notice of motion that we are going to put forward and really how that's going to impact the accountability and transparency of the government by producing documents that in some cases may be uncomfortable for them to produce and that may be very newsworthy as well.

I would encourage at least my fellow Conservative members, and certainly the members of the Bloc and the NDP, to consider all aspects of what this means, Madam Chair. I do reserve the right to speak again.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I always appreciate a robust discussion. I believe that's an important part of the reason we're here. I appreciate the most considerate mention of Mr. Christopherson, who was an amazing member of Parliament and someone I considered to be a mentor to me. I'm very proud of the work he did in this place and I miss him.

I just want to be really clear, though, that this is not about moving a motion that will fundamentally change the Standing Orders. This is for the 43rd Parliament. I just want to put that out there again as a reminder. This is very specific and clear about this Parliament. It's not a fundamental change. It's one that will take place during this Parliament.

The precedent has already been set through the motion that was put on the floor for the Conservatives. I will remind everyone that that motion was not unanimously agreed to in the House of Commons, and yet here it is in practice, and that is the case in some of these situations.

I'm not sure what happened, but in good faith we did reach out to every office of the other parties. If there was a miscommunication, I would love to hear how we could do better in the future. I leave that to the Conservatives to let me know. At the end of the day, I believe that this is a Parliament in which we know Canadians want to see a spirit of co-operation, of collaboration, and of respect for the parties that were sent here. This is our way to move forward to have better outcomes.

We know that yesterday in the finance and trade committees the decision to defer the vote for the vice-chairs was unanimous, as far

as I heard. Obviously there was already understanding that there were some discussions happening, and I just want to appreciate that. One of the things that need to be understood here is that this is really about allowing space for all parties so that there isn't debate and discouragement between the two other opposition parties about who should be in what role. This is about respecting all parties, and I think this is one of the best parts about a minority Parliament.

Of course, as you all may know, I am a strong supporter of electoral reform and would have loved to see a different format. That's not where we're at, but we are in a minority situation with three opposition parties. This motion allows all of those parties to be recognized and respected in that role. I'm sad to see this debate go on. I was hoping that people would see the sense of collaboration and move forward. Hopefully we can move forward to a vote and get onto the important business that we need to do to ensure that the committees in this place are up and running as soon as they possibly can.

Thank you.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

I'll just add my name back on the list in case I have further things to say. I did notice you have a speakers list, but I may have other things that come up. Even just now, as Ms. Blaney spoke, I found that there were some things I wanted to rebut.

**The Chair:** You can address them now.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Understood, but my point is that it may happen again in the remainder of the debate, so I want to make sure my name is there for those opportunities. I may or may not use it. It's there. Thank you for that.

I have a few different things in terms of thoughts here. The main principle for me is certainly the idea that we're talking about a Standing Orders change that is being proposed, to be done essentially by.... Notwithstanding the fact that I guess Ms. Blaney feels that some notice was given to others, I was not aware of it. I don't believe that any of my colleagues sitting here as part of the official opposition were aware of it prior to this morning. We are talking about changes to the Standing Orders here, without a lot of time to consider them and, obviously and more importantly, without time for those who are not here to consider them.

The Standing Orders of course impact all members of Parliament. Given that, what we're talking about is something that essentially impacts their abilities as members of Parliament, and on their rights, opportunities and privileges, without their having had that opportunity to have a say, both as individuals and then globally as caucuses and as parties. That was obviously something that both we and the previous member of the NDP who served on this committee in the last Parliament fought very hard for.

I would have to think that Ms. Blaney's former colleague, Mr. Christopherson, would be cringing right now at the thought that for something he fought so long and hard for his party is now prepared to just let that principle go. I would imagine that he would be significantly troubled by that, and rightfully so. We fought hard for that principle for a reason. It shouldn't be the right of the government, or of any one party or parties, to make those kinds of changes to the way this place functions without all parties having a chance to have a say on that and a chance to give their consent or their agreement to it.

I'll get into some other things here in a second before I continue with that argument, because we saw that play out a few different times in the last Parliament. We saw that play out when the government proposed to make changes to the Standing Orders. I want to talk a bit more about that history in a second, because I think it's good context for members, especially as I look around the table. There are some members of Parliament who were newly elected in the last election. They may not have had the benefit of the context of those discussions that took place in the last Parliament and of the lengthy meeting we had.

I see that Mr. Genuis is here. He was a very significant part of the lengthy conversations that occurred at that time. You and I, Madam Chair, were there for many hours of that debate. It did go on for many, many hours. If I recall correctly, the meeting began in about the middle of March and didn't conclude till the early part of May. It was a very lengthy discussion. As I said, I was there for many hours, as were you, Madam Chair. Mr. Genuis managed to keep us all entertained and informed for many hours on end on a couple of occasions during that debate. I know that many people were riveted by every word he had to say at that time. He may choose to have some input in this conversation today if one of his colleagues would choose to give him the opportunity to sub in. Who knows?

The point is that it was a principle we were fighting for: the idea that changes to the Standing Orders are not something that the Prime Minister's Office gets to make or that one party in Parliament gets to make. These are significant things. What we are talking about has an impact upon all the committees in this place. It has an impact upon all the members and all the caucuses. Therefore, they all need to have a chance to be a part of the conversation before that happens.

• (1215)

Ultimately, with those Standing Orders changes that were proposed then, that was in fact where we ended up after all that time, that this would be how things would happen, so the changes that were being proposed then didn't happen.

I want to come back to those in a minute or two because, again, I think that context is important.

Ms. Blaney referenced the electoral reform change that the government had promised in the 2015 election. The Liberal Party made a promise during the election that it was going to be the last election of first past the post. The NDP lost many supporters to the Liberal Party as a result of that promise. Of course, the Liberals then chose to break that promise, and she referenced that she was disappointed that had occurred.

You and I sat on the special committee that looked at electoral reform. I raise that because this was something that I think demonstrated the way these things should proceed, the way they should happen. In the conversation around electoral reform.... I'm not suggesting that in order to make this Standing Orders change there would need to be these kinds of things, but what happened in the electoral reform special committee was that we travelled across the country and we heard from Canadians. We had extensive opportunity for Canadians to be heard. All parties put forward different viewpoints. The Liberals pulled a bait and switch, and what they held out to many people who came over from other parties to support them, like the NDP, was that they would....

Essentially many people believed—and I know candidates for the Liberal Party who explicitly indicated—that proportional representation or some form of that would be the result of that. Obviously the Prime Minister had different ideas. He wanted to do something that would benefit his party and his party alone and ensure that they essentially remain in power perpetually. Obviously there were a lot of people who were incredibly disappointed, who had gone over and supported his party for that reason and solely for that reason. That was the position of the Liberal Party, which they felt was appropriate and was something they could do.

I suspect that it probably has something to do with why Canadians knocked them from a majority to a minority government in this past election. There were other reasons, of course, and some of the ethical failings of the Prime Minister certainly were among those things. I would assume that the lack of fiscal responsibility that the government showed was, for other Canadians, probably a significant part in their being knocked from a majority to a minority. Certainly some people, particularly the NDP supporters who came over to the Liberal Party in that election, probably came over for that reason and were quite sadly disappointed.

Of course the NDP continued, as did the Green Party, to have the opportunity to be a part of that. The Green Party did have a member on that committee at the time, and that was again because of the uniqueness of what was being proposed and discussed there.

I see members are reacting to the numerous binders that Mr. Genuis was just handed. That would be reminiscent for some people of those days that I was just referring to. I remember one of my other colleagues, Mr. Kmiec, coming in with boxes of papers and things.

I also recall I had two backpacks at the time, much like—I don't know if I'm allowed to use props at committees—the one I have today. I had two about that size and they were full of emails that I had received from Canadians. That's how many people were emailing to express their disappointment with the fact that the government was trying to move forward with those kinds of Standing Orders changes without giving them a say in it.

We were talking about some quite significant changes. There was talk about changes so that there would be only a four-day work week here in Parliament. There was talk about changes so that the Prime Minister would have to be here only one day a week to be held accountable, and about how there would be fewer question periods in which the government would be held accountable. Canadians rightfully, seriously and strenuously objected to those changes. That's why I had those two backpacks full of emails.

I know that I spent, at one point, several hours reading from those emails so that Canadians were getting a direct say in the committee. I probably didn't even get through 10% of them.

• (1220)

In fact, I kept a backpack as a kind of souvenir. The emails, when they were printed, weighed down one backpack so heavily they tore the strap right off. It spoke to the fact that Canadians were quite concerned about what was occurring.

I want to come back to what I was talking about, though, with the electoral reform committee. The NDP and the Green Party at that time were of the position that what the government had put forward was what they wanted to see, and....

Pardon me, I should say it was what the Liberal Party had put forward. It's very different, and I need to make that distinction. What the Liberal Party put forward during the 2015 election and what the government then put forward were two very different things. I should make that distinction. It's very clear, and it's very important that I make that distinction, because it is different. They believed that what should happen was what the Liberal Party, before becoming government, what Justin Trudeau's candidates led Canadians to believe was what they should move forward with. That was the principle that the NDP and the Green Party were fighting for at that time.

Of course, as Conservatives, we firmly believe that the electoral system does not belong to political parties or to politicians. It belongs to Canadians. We therefore very strongly stood for the principle that to make those kinds of changes, the decision should be made by Canadians themselves. It's their electoral system. We firmly pushed for the idea that a referendum be required in order to make those kinds of changes. A huge majority of Canadians were supportive of that. I think it had a lot to do with the reason the government chose not to proceed with their bait and switch proposal that they were going to try to ram through. What ultimately happened was that the committee...much like what we are suggesting should happen with the proposal that's been put forward today, first by Mr. Gerretsen and second by Ms. Blaney, by the Liberal Party and then the NDP Party, for an additional vice-chair, a third vice-chair—which, I will point out for the benefit of Canadians, does come with a pay raise. Some would argue that this might be the reason for the suggestion that it happen. I'll point out that....

Actually, I'll come back to that point in a minute. There is something that's important to point out, and it's one of the reasons I have some concern. The bottom line is that at that time, what happened is what should be happening with this kind of proposal with the Standing Orders, which is that some discussion should happen. When we are talking about making a change that impacts how Parliament operates, how the committees of Parliament operate, that

impacts how things are done for Canadians. Those kinds of discussions need to happen. It shouldn't be a decision made by a dozen of us here on no notice, or very little notice, with some being new members to this Parliament and some being veteran members.

Having said all that, it is something that all members of all caucuses should be able to have some input on, whether that be through their whip, their House leader or through their caucus meetings. Obviously, that is what happened at that time with the changes to the Standing Orders, as I referenced earlier, and electoral reform. There ended up being a lot of discussion behind the scenes and amongst the parties. There ended up being opportunities for the caucuses. In fact, we formally made that indication, I think at least with the changes to the Standing Orders—I can't recall if it happened with electoral reform, but I believe it may have—where we all agreed that this was important enough that our caucuses should be consulted. We allowed time for that to happen. That obviously takes time. You can't just call....

In the case of our party, how many seats do we hold?

• (1225)

**Mr. John Brassard:** It's 121.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** We have 121 members of Parliament. In the case of the Liberal Party, what do they have? Someone says it is 156, but whatever it is, it is somewhere in that neighbourhood. You don't just call that many members of Parliament together on five minutes' notice. We all have committees. We have duties in the House of Commons. Times are set aside, obviously.

This is for the benefit of anyone who might be listening out there outside of Parliament. I know it is wishful thinking on my part, or maybe on the part of all of us, to think that Canadians are paying attention to the proceedings of this committee at this point in time, but maybe they are. Who knows? Some people probably are.

The bottom line for those people and for their benefit is that that's why there is time set aside on Wednesday mornings every week for caucuses to meet so that those kinds of conversations can occur. That's the kind of thing that probably should happen with something like this. That is the principle upon which we are standing here today. That is the principle that in the last Parliament the NDP stood with us to fight for as well. That's what we believe should happen.

I want to come back to the argument I just briefly raised, which is about one of my concerns with the motion. This is simply a concern I have. Maybe others share it; maybe they don't, but that's why there is need for conversation.

One of those thoughts for me is that we've always operated.... This is actually the fourth Parliament in which I've served. I sat on the government side through a minority Parliament. I sat on the government side in a majority Parliament. I sat on the opposition side for a majority Parliament, and I'm now sitting on the opposition in a minority Parliament, so I've been through all four kinds of scenarios that can occur.

Ms. Duncan, you would have sat through all four of those scenarios as well, I believe. Maybe it's just the two of us who have done that here, but you understand that as well.

Each of those scenarios is unique for various reasons, but the bottom line is that I have sat on a number of committees. I sat on this committee for some time, but I also sat on a number of other committees. I chaired a couple of different committees as well, so I have a fairly rounded experience with committees as well through the different types of Parliament, sitting as a chair, as a vice-chair, as a regular member, and as a member of a steering committee. I've sat on subcommittees and special committees as well. I have been on a number of special committees. I have had fairly extensive experience having sat in a variety of different scenarios on committees. Probably just about every scenario with committees that you can think of, I've been a part of in some way.

The reason I raise that is not to display my resumé here or anything like that, but to indicate that what we've always had with committees is that there is a chair, which in many cases.... We can actually go back to the lengthy six-week meeting that we had when the chair, I believe, remained in his chair of this committee. It was Mr. Bagnell at the time, who, I will just parenthetically indicate, I'm sure would be having flashbacks right now to that time. He's probably quite glad he was made a parliamentary secretary so he wasn't eligible to be a chair or maybe he'd still be here and having flashbacks—

**An hon. member:** I'm having flashbacks.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'm sure you are and many would be, but it was much more difficult for him than for anybody else because he needed to remain in his chair. He speculated on how he was able to do that. I won't get into the details of what we speculated may have occurred or not occurred, but it would have been very difficult. It was probably difficult even for his health, without doubt, and so he would be having flashbacks, I'm sure.

• (1230)

The point I was making was that, 95% or more of the time, the chair is here and able to be here. Obviously when you're the chair of a committee it's a responsibility that you take seriously.

I'm sure you do, Madam Chair.

I know I did when I was chair as well. You make it a priority, as members of committees generally do. However, as chair it's that much more serious that you take the responsibility to be there for those committee meetings. Sometimes other things come up that require a member's attention elsewhere, or maybe it's something in their riding or otherwise, but as chair of a committee you make that much more of an effort to try to be there. Because of that, I don't recall ever having to have one of my vice-chairs sit in the chair when I was chair of the two different committees that I chaired.

Often that's the case. Chairs very rarely need to be vacant from the chair during a meeting, but there are occasions when it does happen for some reason or another. It's very rare that you'll find that either the first vice-chair or the second vice-chair isn't available in that scenario.

I point that out for the simple reason that what's being proposed obviously is to create a third vice-chair. I just don't see that there is a demonstrated need or that it's really something necessary. It does, as I pointed out, come with a pay increase. It's not insignificant by

any means. Many Canadians would find—I don't even know what it is exactly—\$6,000, roughly, quite significant to their budgets, their bottom lines and their households. I guess that's understandable, given that there is an expectation that those people would be available for that role and it does carry some extra responsibility.

The point I'm making is that so rarely have we ever needed to go to a situation where we need more than a vice-chair and a second vice-chair, that there would certainly be Canadians who would say that's their tax dollars and that money could make a real difference for their families. Do we really need to be paying a third person that kind of money to be a vice-chair?

I know an argument is made, and it is a legitimate one to some degree, that the money is maybe not just in recognition of being available to the chair of the committee, or to be part of a steering committee, or various things like that, but that it's all in recognition of the extra work involved in being your party's critic. Obviously not in all cases is the vice-chair the party's critic, but that quite often happens. That's how it plays out.

I would argue back that those who are not necessarily critics still serve on the committee. There are a number of people that's the case for on this committee. This committee and the finance committee typically sit a lot more hours than other committees do. It's just the reality of the matter. You could maybe make the argument that for committees that sit beyond a certain amount of time, maybe all the members should be paid extra because that's an extra responsibility. I'm not making that argument. I'm just saying that's maybe the argument some would then make.

Also, what about the idea of deputy critics? They're not receiving extra compensation, so is that something that should happen? That would be the logical conclusion of those arguments. I'm not making that argument, because—

• (1235)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

I don't want to interrupt my colleague for too long, because I am enjoying his remarks, but he was sort of inching toward an argument that members of Parliament should be paid by the word, effectively, by the number of things they say. It would be a bit of a conflict of interest for me to go too far into defending that argument, but I would just be curious if the member thinks that's a good idea, because I might be sympathetic to it.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That's definitely an interesting interjection, and it certainly would be self-serving on Mr. Genuis's part to suggest that. He wasn't seriously doing so.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Garnett would be a multi-millionaire.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** There would be a few people—Mr. Genuis included, and Mr. Lamoureux would be another example—who would be really rich if that were ever proposed in this Parliament. Had the Liberal Party been able to go forward with the changes to the Standing Orders they tried to make in the last Parliament, the Prime Minister would be quite poor because he would make very little, as he was going to try to be here only one day a week, but that's another story.

Mind you, I guess his trust fund would still be there, so he'd be okay. Anyway, that's another aside.

The bottom line is that—obviously, as someone who is a Conservative, I believe in fiscal responsibility and I am a fiscal conservative—that argument is a hard argument to make to Canadians, that MPs should be paid by the word or that they should be paid extra for being a third vice-chair of some committee or something like that. I think that would be a hard argument to pass by many Canadians.

That's really a secondary thing in my mind. It is something I think was worth raising, because I am a fiscal conservative and I do believe that's something we need to be considering when we're looking at something like this. Far more important is the principle that, first of all, all members and all parties are affected by these changes. The history of changes to the Standing Orders being done with that kind of consent, which we established in the last Parliament with this committee, is important.

Again, I believe that when we're talking about this kind of change, there should be a conversation that occurs among the parties and within the parties. In other words, caucus members, members of other committees and the caucuses themselves should have the ability to have some conversation about this, and then there should be conversation among the parties.

When this was raised this morning, we recessed for a while, and I believe that during that recess there were different conversations that occurred among different parties. That was a good start, but obviously there wasn't a resolution to that, because here we are.

My argument, and the reason I moved to adjourn the debate, was that it would allow that to happen, and that's what is going to happen ultimately here anyway. It's unfortunate that you all had to sit and listen to me and to others for an hour and 10 minutes, when we could have been doing things that probably you would have enjoyed a lot more, or that would have been more productive for you.

I do appreciate some of my colleagues indicating that they're enjoying it, but I wonder how genuine those sentiments are. The bottom line is that having a debate here, instead of having those conversations, is unfortunately also not letting us do what I think we need to accomplish today, which is to get those routine motions dealt with so that other committees can understand and see what sort of precedent is being set by PROC, so they can get going with their work.

There are a lot of very important things that need to occur with these committees and there are important issues to be dealt with. We're in a minority Parliament, so these committees have that much more importance and ability to actually impact things that are important to Canadians, which will impact their lives and their future.

It's really unfortunate that this will not occur as quickly as it should because we weren't able to get to something that we needed to get to, especially since we all understand that the outcome of this is going to be that those conversations are going to occur anyway, so we could have dealt with those things. That's quite unfortunate.

• (1240)

The principle that all members are affected, I mentioned this briefly earlier, but I did say I wanted to come back to it, and I will now. In the last Parliament, when the government at that time proposed a number of changes to the Standing Orders, the primary ones among them were the ones that received the most negative reactions from Canadians.

The first was the idea that the Prime Minister would be required to be here and held accountable to Parliament, and therefore to Canadians, for only one day a week. I've certainly heard over the last little while that the Prime Minister was largely AWOL following the election and that he has taken mostly holiday time in that period. That's something I've heard many times from constituents and other Canadians. They're quite offended by the fact that he was just re-elected to his job and feels like he can essentially take a leave of absence and hand over his responsibilities to someone else he has appointed to sort of do his job for him. That's been very offensive to a lot of Canadians. They have been quite concerned about that.

You can understand why they would be concerned about this idea that he be required to come here only one day a week. It seems to be a pattern for him. He doesn't really.... I think he likes having the title. He likes the prestige and he likes the star status. He likes all those things, but he doesn't really want to do the job or do the work, and when he does do the work, it seems to be just to reward his own friends or to reward himself, and that's not really in the best interests of Canadians.

I can give a number of examples of that, but I'll set those aside for just a second, because I want to get to some of the other points about the changes to the Standing Orders that were proposed. The idea that the Prime Minister would have to come and be held accountable to Parliament for only one day a week was something that many people were.... As I indicated earlier, I received thousands of emails, as did other members of the committee—those same emails—from Canadians who were really upset by that.

Then there was the idea that all of Parliament would sit just four days a week. I know that many Canadians think it would be wonderful to have to work only four days a week, but that's not the case for most Canadians. They were quite concerned about that.

In my mind, yes, there are of course arguments to be made. Just because Parliament isn't sitting, that doesn't mean MPs aren't working, of course. They're in their ridings, meeting with constituents, etc. Those are legitimate arguments, understandably, but what it does mean, with certainty, is that it's one day less that the government is there to be held accountable to Canadians, especially in question period, but in other ways as well. It's one less opportunity for members to bring forward things such as private members' bills, which are their opportunity to have an impact on changes for the country.

Actually, that's worth fleshing out just a little, because not all Canadians understand how private members' business works. At the start of this Parliament, like all Parliaments, there is in fact—and people are often shocked to hear this—a lottery that occurs. Essentially, just like you would draw if you were trying to win Lotto 6/49, you draw to try to win the right to bring forward, as a private member, legislation or a motion that gets debated in the House of Commons and has a chance to pass.

I've been quite fortunate in the four draws that I've been a part of. Well, twice I wasn't very fortunate, actually; twice I drew very near the bottom of the list and that meant I would not get an opportunity. That was in this Parliament and in the first one I sat in, but in the middle of those, in the second and third Parliaments I sat in, I drew quite high—very high, in fact—and I knew I would have a very quick opportunity to bring forward legislation.

I've been quite fortunate that both in government and in opposition I was able to have private members' business pass. It's a pretty rare thing to do it in opposition, and it's also quite rare for anyone to have done it twice. In fact, I bet you that I am among a very select number of people on that one. I consider myself very fortunate.

Those changes were very significant. We were able to make a change to the Criminal Code that would allow for our communities to be safer. We were also able to push forward the idea of providing for better compassion and concern for parents who have lost a child.

• (1245)

Those were opportunities to do that, but I received those by way of a lottery system. The reason I raise this is that, when the government was talking about the idea of removing some of the time that Parliament would sit, that would likely have had the impact that less private members' business would have the opportunity to proceed. Because that was the case, many people objected to that, both as MPs and as individual Canadians.

As I've just indicated, there already is a difficulty. Not all members of Parliament get the opportunity to do that in Parliament. We have these conversations with MPs so that we understand who's going to get those opportunities and who's not. As an example, in this Parliament, I have some ideas that I'd like to see brought forward as private members' business, but I actually won't get that chance. What I've had to do instead is look at those lists to see who drew in a higher spot than I did and hope that I can convince one of my colleagues to maybe bring that idea forward because they think it's also a good idea. That's kind of how that works.

Those were some of the things that were being changed.

Now, one thing that has been put forward today in terms of suggestions on other ways that this could be dealt with is something that, again, conversations could happen about, if and when we get to that point. We'll get to that point at the end of this meeting, in which we actually could have dealt with other things, but I know that a Liberal member proposed this in one of the other committees, in my understanding.

It's this idea. Why not have a discussion about whether there could be a change made so that the other opposition parties...? In

fact, I don't know if there would even need to be a change to the Standing Orders to provide for this, because my understanding of the way it sits now is that the second vice-chair is required to be a member of one of the other opposition parties. If the opposition parties want to have opportunities to be vice-chairs, why couldn't there be an opportunity to split those chairs of all the committees? We could even go so far as to split some of the chairs of the committees rather than having government chairs. That's another option. There are a variety of different options that could be proceeded with here, but there need to be some conversations about what occurs, and if we were to have a vote today, that's not happening.

Those changes were proposed at that time. As the chair will well remember, there was that six-week-long debate. I can't remember how many hours the committee sat for during that six-week period. I don't know if anyone can refresh my memory.

• (1250)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Not enough.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Mr. Genuis says “not enough”. He had a lot more to say, I know.

I was in the same boat. As I indicated earlier, I got a chance to read probably only 10% of those emails that Canadians sent in. I thought it was good that all Canadians were getting a chance. It's not something that happens all the time that Canadians get the opportunity to have a direct say in committee. I was giving that voice to them by doing that. I could have taken probably, I don't know, many more hours to do that. I could have spent probably 30 or 40 hours reading all those, based on how long it took to read the 10% I did read. The committee sat for hundreds of hours, I'm sure. It was to stand up for a democratic principle.

I did talk about this a little bit earlier, but I didn't get to finish my thought on it. With the electoral reform committee, something similar happened. We had all those consultations, which the chair will remember well. All across Canada we had opportunities for experts to come in. Many of the experts were academics or university professors who study political science. They came in with, in some cases, historical context. In some cases, it was to enlighten us on what other countries were doing, or on what some of the provinces within Canada have proposed or done in the past. In some cases, it was to bring forward new models that had either been used in practice elsewhere or were just theoretical models of what could happen.

There was one thing that I think we identified very quickly. I think it happened among members who were advocating for change and among members who, like me, really believed it was more for Canadians to have a say. What we did arrive at really quickly was that many of the models we saw out there that were applied in other countries.... Although most, if not all, would agree that our electoral system is not perfect, we quickly discovered that probably no electoral system is perfect. We also discovered that for countries that have tried other things, or jurisdictions that have tried other things, new problems arise with the changes they make. We also really quickly established that, in many cases, countries are different. There are different realities to Canada, as there are to many of these other countries. We have a very unique country, actually, in Canada. We have a very unique country because of the size of our country, because of the geography of our country, and because of some of the distinctness due to that size and how widely dispersed the population is. There's some incredible distinctness in different regions and in different parts of the country.

If you applied a system that's been applied to a country that doesn't have those same distinctions and differences and uniqueness to it, there would be real problems. In many cases, people who were coming forward with proposals to that committee were coming forward with a modified or adapted-to-Canada version of various models that had been applied elsewhere. That became very interesting, but I found that with every one of those proposals, there was something that just didn't quite fit or didn't quite work. It was like trying to put a square peg into a round hole, that kind of thing. It just didn't quite work in all those instances.

In the end, the committee did come up with what they saw as a bit of a compromise, I suppose, on some kind of system that not all of us agreed with, certainly, but some members did. We did it on the principle that any suggestion being made there would be put forward to Canadians for a referendum, for them to have their say. Because of that, those of us who weren't so certain about the proposal that was being put forward were comfortable. We believed it really was up to Canadians to make that decision anyway. The bottom line is that lots of conversations occurred, not just around the table in the committee room, as is happening today, but outside of that, on the sidelines and in the background of those things, as often happens with things here in Parliament. It can be more productive when everybody has a chance to have a say. Sometimes you're having a say through your House leader or through your whip or whatever.

• (1255)

We all have an opportunity to get our input that way. It's not possible.... For me today, I've been talking for quite some time. Any of my colleagues who maybe would have wanted an opportunity to give their thoughts to me as one of the vice-chairs of the committee wouldn't have had that opportunity today. It's only because we do have to.... To make sure there isn't a decision made on something on which we don't feel there is an ability to make a decision, of course I'm having to talk for some time. Therefore, if my colleagues wanted to talk to me right now, they couldn't, because I'm a little busy.

**The Chair:** Do you mind if I ask you a question? You still have the floor.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sure. Of course, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Could I just get the pulse of the committee, and from you directly as well, on whether there would be an appetite to adjourn the debate, to put a pause on the debate as your motion was originally, and perhaps move on to some of the other routine motions at this time? Would there be any appetite for that or are we still...?

You still have the floor. Don't worry.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'll seek advice from our clerk on this if it's something that could be considered. I don't know if I can propose that a second time in the same debate, but I would be prepared to make that motion a second time if that would be helpful.

**The Chair:** Since you have the floor, you would have the ability.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I do have the ability to do that. Okay. I would then move that we adjourn debate at this time.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** You called the question. We're already on that motion.

**The Chair:** Mr. Alhabra.

**Mr. Omar Alhabra:** Absolutely, we need to recess for a couple of minutes to discuss this.

**The Chair:** Is that to discuss adjourning debate?

**Mr. Omar Alhabra:** Yes, if each of—

**The Chair:** Okay.

Are you moving...?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I'm prepared to do that, but it sounds like we need a recess before doing that.

**The Chair:** All right. Just a moment.

Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I just wanted to add that this is Ms. Blaney's motion. I don't want to speak on behalf of all the members, but my position, at least, would be that we would not be interested in voting in favour of adjourning debate unless that's what she wants to do.

**The Chair:** As Mr. Alhabra pointed out, he asked for a quick recess.

Do you think it would be a very short recess, meaning one minute? As you can see, the time is almost one o'clock.

**Mr. Omar Alhabra:** Yes.

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

• (1255)

(Pause)

• (1305)

**The Chair:** There has been a lot of time to discuss. I am hoping that it has brought some clarity.

We'll carry on with the meeting.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Should I move the motion to adjourn the debate?

I'm looking at you because you were the one who—

**The Chair:** Maybe Ms. Blaney could give us some clarity.

Mr. Richards is giving you some leeway here, as to whether he is going to take the floor back, or...

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** The clarification I would like is that if this debate is suspended, I want to make sure it will be top and centre in the next meeting of the committee.

**The Chair:** It is my understanding—and you can correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Clerk—that we would not carry on today with the debate on your motion, but that at the next meeting you would have the opportunity to bring it up.

Just like most things, it would be at the will of the committee whether we would have it back on the agenda for our next meeting. It's not automatic that it would be.

It's suspended temporarily.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Ms. Blaney, as a member of the committee, would be able to put that on the agenda. Is that correct?

**The Chair:** It is common practice that we would carry on with the motion that is before us, as soon as possible and usually in the very next meeting.

More technically, if we were to get very formal about it, you would have the opportunity to move that your motion be heard and then we would vote on it. If the committee chose to move on to another agenda item, that would be a possibility. I do want to be clear with you on that, Ms. Blaney.

As a practice, it would be something the committee would generally move back to, knowing that we had adjourned with that intention.

• (1310)

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** May I have one more clarification?

Seeing that the time allotted for the committee has passed, I'm wondering whether, if we do this, it would mean that after this is done we'll be adjourning the meeting and getting back to other committee business, or whether it will be continuing. Could the chair advise me?

**The Chair:** Adjourning the debate on this issue, even though we have gone past one o'clock, does not mean that the meeting would be over. We could, if the committee wishes, move on to the routine motions and take care of some of those.

Of course, the committee could also move to adjourn the meeting, and then there would actually be a formal vote taken on that.

Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** I have something to add to that, which would be helpful, Chair.

My understanding—and anyone can correct me if I am wrong—is that on the routine motions there has been what should have occurred with this other proposal, a discussion and agreement on the routine motions that are going to be presented. I would assume that, given that, we would all be able to just proceed very quickly and get those done so that committees can move on. We don't have to

debate it, because it has already been discussed, much as should have happened with these other proposals.

My understanding is—

**The Chair:** It's already been discussed by whom?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** —and I hope this helps the other members of the committee, that we should be able to just get it done like that.

**The Chair:** Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I'm comfortable with the suspension, and I will be moving the motion if it isn't put on the agenda at the next meeting.

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards, would you like to move?

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Sure. I'll again move to adjourn the debate on this issue.

**The Chair:** Okay. Should we adjourn debate?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Now we will move to routine motions.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** You recognized me, right, Madam Chair? I don't want to speak out of turn.

**The Chair:** Mr. Gerretsen, yes, you have the floor.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I would like to put forward the required motion to deal with the routine motions for PROC. These are in both official languages. I apologize for the previous one.

The first one is with respect to the analysts. I would move:

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

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The analysts have been waiting very patiently in the back of the room to take their place. We have agreement to this.

Welcome.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Do we wait for them to come up or should I continue?

**The Chair:** Yes, I think we should. Let's just have the analysts. Actually, we didn't even get the opportunity, just quickly, to introduce our clerks as well so we all know who does all the fantastic work behind the scenes and up here.

**A voice:** Sorry, I'm a sub.

**The Chair:** I want you to introduce yourselves.

**Mr. Andre Barnes (Committee Researcher):** Hi, I'm Andre Barnes. I work for the Library of Parliament. It's a pleasure.

**Ms. Michaela Keenan-Pelletier (Committee Researcher):** I'm Michaela Keenan-Pelletier, also an analyst with the Library of Parliament.

**The Clerk:** I'm Justin Vaive, the clerk of the procedural committee.



**Ms. Erica Pereira (Committee Clerk):** I'm Erica Pereira. I'm just here for support today. I'm the clerk of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

**The Chair:** I'll be seeing you there.

You have the floor, Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you.

With respect to the delegation of authority to whips, I move:

That the four whips be delegated the authority to act as the striking committee pursuant to Standing Orders 104, 113 and 114, and that they be authorized to present to the Chair, in a report signed by all four whips, or their representatives, their unanimous recommendations for presentation to the House, on behalf of the Committee.

(Motion agreed to)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** With respect to the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business, I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(1), the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business be composed of one (1) member from each recognized party and a Chair from the Government party; and that Ginette Petitpas Taylor be appointed Chair of the Subcommittee.

• (1315)

**The Chair:** Mr. Richards.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** On a point of order, given that we are over time, I just want to check. I don't know the admissibility of this on a procedural basis, but we have a package in front of us. Would it be possible for Mr. Gerretsen to simply move that the package as presented be adopted? That would save us some time.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Oh, I'm happy to move them. I would prefer that. I was just going by the way it was done last time. Yes, thank you.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** You could even just move what's in it for each one and that would still save time, rather than having to read them, especially since one or two of them are pretty lengthy there.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Yes.

**The Chair:** If we have agreement, if we have consent to move it as a package, since I believe a lot of the different parties have taken a look at this, then we may do so.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** I'd be happy to move the balance of the routine motions as presented in the package.

**The Chair:** Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I have one proposition that was accepted in the finance committee yesterday for the reduced quorum. Right now, where it says, "That the Chair", if you go down further it says, "provided that at least four (4) members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the government". I'm just wondering, because it's four, if we could change it to "two members of the opposition and two members of the government".

That's it.

**The Chair:** Does everyone understand the change that's been proposed by Ms. Blaney?

Is everyone in agreement?

(Amendment agreed to)

**The Chair:** Do you all agree to move forward with the package, with the proposed change?

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

**The Chair:** Okay. So be it.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Great job, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** That was such an easy first meeting, wasn't it?

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** We've all agreed and passed the routine motions.

We can adjourn for today.





Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>