



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

PROC • NUMBER 002 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, October 24, 2013

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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): We'll start our meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

We have a number of things to cover today, if we can get to them, but the first thing I want to cover is that the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business met just before this meeting and has prepared a report, or will have prepared a report, for the House for tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. MacKenzie and the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business.

When we last met—

An hon. member: Who's on that subcommittee?

The Chair: Mr. MacKenzie, would you like to tell us the members of your subcommittee? I know it's Mr. Butt....

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): We had two subbed members in today from the opposition parties. Mr. Valeriote was here and....

Ms. Nicole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Sadia Groguhé.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Julian, on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm new to the committee, of course, on this study that stems from the NDP motion that was passed by Parliament just before the summer. I understand the Library of Parliament has done some work, and I want to request, Mr. Chair, that it be made available—

The Chair: I'd be happy to do that.

Mr. Peter Julian: —to committee members now, if that study is complete.

Thank you.

The Chair: Well, if you'd like to move to that study, I'd be happy to distribute the stuff with it.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Let's hope we can get to that order of business today. There are a number of things based around that study, but I really would like to get that information out to members, too.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Just about the order—you're probably getting to that—Mr. Christopherson, I believe, had the floor before we adjourned.

The Chair: And was saying such nice things about me there was no way he wasn't going to get back.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: And about Mr. Reid.

I'm beginning to suspect Mr. Christopherson a little bit. He's saying a lot of nice things about Conservatives.

Can we, in effect, pause the debate, have the report back from the clerk, and then judge from there as to where...? We were seeking some advice that she was unable to give us as of last week.

The Chair: I'll certainly answer that.

The clerk has prepared some notes, and they're available to you—not necessarily a ruling, but some notes on the issue. She has them for you, if you'd like to come and get them.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Our great concern on Tuesday with the government—and I realize we're not into formal meetings here—was that they had proposed changing the way we make laws in Parliament and changing the way independent MPs in particular can move amendments. To facilitate this, we had asked for some sort of supportive advice or evidence as to what the effects would be. We didn't get that; we got into a conversation, as much about the process as the effect of the motion.

Is there a way that we can see the information that's provided through you from the clerk and take a couple of minutes to digest it before we get into the debate? There's a sequencing thing that makes it difficult for MPs who are trying to understand what it is the government intends to do without having yet heard a word of evidence or argumentation from the government as to why this is a good thing and should happen. This is going to be their first opportunity.

Does that make sense for the committee members, that we see what the clerk has offered us?

The Chair: Certainly.

We'll distribute them, I guess. They're prepared, so let's do that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: And can we take a pause for a few minutes to look it over?

The Chair: Let's finish off. I see a couple of others.

On this same point of order, Mr. Lamoureux?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Yes, on the same point of order.

Mr. Chair, I know that our time is of great value. I'm looking in particular for Scott or Tom to give some sort of indication as to whether or not the subject matter that we left is what they would like to continue with. I suspect that is in fact the case, because I don't sense that there was any sort of a compromise. I'm eager to see my amendment ultimately voted on, in anticipation that the government would in fact be supportive of it, but there hasn't really been any dialogue.

If we don't have some sort of a consensus that we're going to move forward, my fear is that we're just going to talk out the hour, or the hour will be gone and we will have achieved nothing in two meetings. I would like to be able to see that there's some fruit coming from the committee dealing with whether we're tabling these.... If Tom or Scott can just indicate right at the get-go if we anticipate moving forward on these in terms of votes today...or would it be better for us to table them and then come back to it next week, so we can actually get some things done today?

The Chair: Mr. Lamoureux, I agree with you 100%. The thing is, this is the procedure and House affairs committee and we must follow our procedures.

There's a motion on the floor, amended by you, and that's where we ended, so we may go back to it.

On the same point of order, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Just in response to Kevin's point, where he said if we talk it out there would be a colossal waste of time, I just want to point out to Kevin that I always learn things when David speaks for an hour. I cannot categorize that as a waste of time. I think my colleagues share that.

The Chair: On that point of order, I'm not certain we ever really arrived at a point of order, just so you all know—almost. It took a number of parties to help.

Mr. Cullen, you wanted a couple of minutes to read it through, but since then people have been talking on what could have been points of order. Are we prepared to move forward with Mr. Christopherson?

Yes? On that point of order, try it again. Five minutes?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, I would suggest that we give it a few minutes to let the members around the table read and let's get back to where we were.

The Chair: All right, I would suggest that when you're finished reading, put your head down and I'll know when you've all finished.

We'll suspend until that happens.

• (1205) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1225)

The Chair: Hi folks. We're back. At this moment we still have before us a motion from Mr. Reid with an amendment from Mr. Lamoureux, and we are speaking on the amendment. When we last left, Mr. Christopherson was deep into the explanation of it.

Mr. Christopherson, would you like to go back for us and maybe repeat some of the nice things you said?

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much. I thought that would be a safe place to start, Chair, to pick up with the compliments to the chair on his fine job. That's been proven again this morning by the way you are handling this business, giving the caucuses an opportunity to see if we can find a way procedurally out of this to allow us to give due regard to the matter in front of us, but also to recognize that other important work needs to be done.

I did give those words of praise a little bit tongue in cheek, but I did mean them sincerely, and I do mean it that this morning is another example of good chairing as far as I'm concerned.

On the matter at hand, we appreciate very much the clerk doing the homework for us. Unfortunately the answers lead to us realizing the worst-case scenario, that indeed this is not some minor, little matter. This is indeed going to deny rights to independent members of parliament that they currently enjoy.

I have to say again how unacceptable it is that something that's this big a change is being done in such a ham-fisted manner.

I understand that it's just not as simple as coming in here and doing a strategic strike on certain members' rights. It's happening at other committees with the same motion, so clearly there's a concerted effort on the part of the government to ensure that the rights currently enjoyed by independent members are snuffed out. And so it does speak to how much respect the government really has for independent members of Parliament and Parliament itself. To bring it in this fashion and to be willing to hold....

The only reason we didn't hold up the important work at the last meeting was that there was a mechanism available, and luckily we had enough goodwill between the House leaders and whips that we were able to get that report to Parliament and other important business going, but this government was prepared to hold that up to ram this through. That's what's starting us on a wrong foot before we even get to the substantive matters.

I want to remind colleagues that the response we just got from the clerk was as a result of a very legitimate, intelligent, obvious question from Mr. Julian, which was whether, if we make this change, there will be other unintended consequences—or in the case of the government, intended consequences perhaps.

Then we asked further about it, when the clerk responded that it was certainly a valid but complex question. Given the importance of what clerks tell us at committees and how that affects the work we do, and being a responsible clerk to arguably the most important committee we have, she wanted to make sure that the advice given would be dead on accurate and said that it would take at least 48 hours to get that information.

So the next common sense thing happened, and that was a motion to table. We have a very important matter in front of us. We've asked for information at the first review of this motion. The clerk has advised that it takes 48 hours to get us that information. The government didn't offer it up by way of saying they already had that; they sat there dead quiet. So we moved a motion saying let's table this for two days to get us to where we are today, and in the meantime at that meeting we would get on. This committee had important work.

Some of the work of this committee is indeed allowing and making possible the work of other groups and other committees. This kind of thing matters.

• (1230)

The Chair: Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, on a point of order—and maybe it's a good time for me to pick up on what David has emphasized in terms of other committees—I'm going to ask if we could canvass the committee to see if there would be unanimous support or leave for us to look at something we were instructed to do by the House.

We know that the Board of Internal Economy has been a very hotly debated issue. One of the things we wanted to do was to look at replacing that particular board. This committee has to conduct a study, and that report has to be back by December 2. So we have a very short window in which to call witnesses and do a whole litany of things that need to be done in order to make that happen.

I'm wondering if you wouldn't mind canvassing the committee to see if in fact there would be unanimous support for us to at the very least deal with that issue. Then we'll go back to the subamendment I brought forward. I appreciate what David is suggesting. If we could do that, I think it would be very helpful in terms of our being able to hit that December 2 target.

The Chair: Again, from a procedural point of view, it's very hard for me to accept a request for unanimous consent under a point of order, so at this moment I'm going to have to let Mr. Christopherson carry on. Hopefully, if he agrees with you, he may want to have some discussion during his dissertation about the same.

Are you on the same point of order, Mr. Cullen?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No, I'll follow Mr. Christopherson. I'm putting my name on the list. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: By all means, certainly.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

Given there may be some fluidity to this, I'll make a few comments. I can always get back on the list and keep going if necessary, but hopefully it will not be.

Let me finish concluding my opening thoughts, Chair. I was at the point of recapping what happened at the last meeting leading us to wonder what on earth the government was doing and why they are doing it this way. There was no heads-up given by the lead on the government side to our House leader or our whip to say that this was coming and that it was important. There was nothing. It looked like a bit of an ambush.

I could be wrong, Chair, but I'm not sure even one government member made the case for why this should change, or why there shouldn't be a delay, or refute any of the allegations or concerns we have been raising. They didn't say a word to the best of my knowledge. I stand to be corrected, but I don't recall an engagement on the part of the government in any meaningful way vis-à-vis the process and the unfairness of it, or the content of what is in the motion that's before us now. All of that has us wondering. Then we see it happening at other committees.

The government wonders why it has the reputation it has. It doesn't happen because of just one issue; it's drip, drip, drip, this constant taking of shortcuts with our democratic processes, ignoring laws that you yourselves brought in, such as the fixed election date. It happens all the time, being found in contempt of Parliament, and all of these things. You'd think this government would want to change that channel. This would be the perfect time, two years away from the election with lots of time to sort of change things. Instead, the first thing they do is roll in and try to steamroll over the rest of Parliament.

• (1235)

The Chair: On a second point of order, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): I was on this very committee that dealt with the contempt of Parliament issue. We were not found in contempt of Parliament; we were defeated while that debate was still going on in this committee.

The Chair: Thank you. I was there also.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Again, I appreciate that, Mr. Reid, but that's exactly the response, isn't it? Every time they get nailed or are being called on something for being undemocratic, they find some little technicality to stand on and say, "Well, that's not right because we have this one little thing."

The fact of the matter is that the issue of contempt of Parliament was worn by this government. I would have thought this would be a perfect time, with a Speech from the Throne and a new session, for the government to try to do things differently so they would have a different image going into the election. Yet the first thing they do, at one of the most important committees of Parliament, is get ham-fisted and try to ram through a major change to how we make laws without any respect or due regard for other members of Parliament or proper, fair process.

If the government has any doubt about why we're where we are today, they need to look in the mirror. It would seem that this isn't over, that there is more to this than meets the eye, given what's happening at other committees.

If the government thinks that somehow we were just going to agree and roll over on the rights of other members even though it doesn't affect us directly, they're sadly mistaken, and they should have known ahead of time that they'd be sadly mistaken.

We are not going to sit here and allow any member of Parliament's rights to be snuffed out by this government, particularly through an unfair process that does not give due respect to everybody in this place and the right to have a fair process around it. That's the foundation of our concerns about where we are.

With that, Chair, I will relinquish the floor and ask to be put back on the list.

The Chair: All right, Mr. Christopherson, we'll put your name back on.

Mr. Julian, you are next.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On Tuesday, as committee members, we asked the clerk a series of questions. You'll recall, Mr. Chair, that the Conservative members did not want answers to those questions. Now we've had the answers given to us by the clerk this morning. Through you, Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the clerk. This is extremely important information.

The clerk cites the evidence from the Standing Orders of the House of Commons that the Speaker will normally select only motions that were not or could not be presented at committee. Also shown is the reference of June 6, 2013, in which the Speaker said very clearly that for the reasons listed above, the chair did not select any motions at report stage that could have been considered in committee.

So there is no doubt that this motion brought forward by Mr. Reid, which the Conservatives attempted to ram through at the last committee meeting, despite the fact that we were, as committee members, asking for clarification.... They were doing it because, I gather, Mr. Chair, they were expecting that the opposition would simply not understand the implications of that and that we wouldn't ask the correct questions. Well, they're sorely wrong, Mr. Chair.

The reality is that what we suspected has been confirmed today. This is very clearly an attempt to do only one thing, which is to bulldoze away the rights of those members of Parliament who have been elected by Canadians and who are either independents or belong to parties that are not recognized in the House of Commons.

Mr. Chair, I will say that I believe it is despicable that the Conservatives would attempt to hold up the study that Parliament asked all of us to do, the study to look into the issue of MPs' expenses and doing away with the Board of Internal Economy and the self-policing, which I have no doubt Canadians support doing. The Conservatives tried to hold it up by throwing forward a motion that is designed to eliminate the rights of those members who don't belong to recognized party caucuses.

There is simply no reason and no justification for what Conservatives did on Tuesday, Mr. Chair. It is even more disturbing when we think that this has now been systematically raised at committees right across the House of Commons.

We believe fundamentally in the democratic rights of parliamentarians. Whether we agree or disagree with a parliamentarian, it is not up to any one of us to say that we are going to destroy the rights of those members of Parliament who are elected as independents or elected from non-recognized parties. Whether we're talking about Ms. May or anyone else, they have a right to speak and represent their constituents.

The Conservatives, on Tuesday, pushed forward on a motion that very clearly, from the interpretation we got back today, rips aside those rights.

Mr. Chair, I will say I'm very saddened by this. We had a throne speech last week and there has probably been no point in Canadian history at which a throne speech has been ripped up and thrown in the shredder as quickly as this throne speech has been.

I'll just remind the members opposite of how the throne speech started off. It said two things, speaking to all Canadians, that as Canadians we are inclusive and that Canadians are honourable. Well,

Mr. Chair, this is not an inclusive act. This is an act that is designed to exclude members of Parliament who don't come from a recognized party even though they're elected by Canadians in their ridings and have a right to represent their voters and all of their constituents in the House of Commons, and they have the right that's been granted to them through parliamentary tradition to use the report stage to bring forward amendments to bills they feel strongly about. This is not an inclusive act. This is a very exclusive act, the kind of act that a desperate government would put into place. It completely belies all of the language in the throne speech we heard last week.

As for the second thing, that we are honourable, Mr. Chair, I have no doubt that Canadians are honourable. I have no doubt that if this issue were put to Canadians across the country, even in Conservative-held ridings, they would say, "Well hold on. Why are we attacking those who are from non-recognized parties? Why are we attacking Ms. May? Why are we attacking an independent member like Mr. Rathgeber, who is representing his constituents and trying to do a good job on their behalf?" Why are we attacking them when we, as parliamentarians from recognized parties, have those tools and they have one tool, which is report stage amendments?

• (1240)

If we ask what the honourable action is, Mr. Chair, the honourable action for this government and members of the governing party on this committee is simply to withdraw this. The motion is not appropriate at all. It completely contradicts the throne speech and the language that was supposed to set a new tone for the government. What it really does is to put us back on a path of confrontation and denial of democratic rights. It is not for the Prime Minister and government members to try to shut down the few tools that members from non-recognized parties have.

If we're talking about independent members, if we're talking about Ms. May, they have a right to be here. They have a right to represent their constituents. They already cannot be members of committees. They're already excluded from a number of fora. That I understand, because you do have to have a minimum level for participation in committees. That I can perhaps understand, but I cannot understand a government that tries to rip apart the rights that they've acquired over decades. It's not an easy thing to present report stage amendments. I don't think Ms. May particularly enjoys doing it, but it's the one tool she has to represent her constituents. She had a right to do that. This motion that was presented on Tuesday rips apart those fundamental rights—and we now have confirmation of it.

Perhaps government members could have said on Tuesday, "Well, we don't know any better". That still doesn't explain why they refused the tabling motion that we put forward, which was a very reasonable approach. But now they understand. Now we have the interpretation. Now we know that what this does is to gut report stage amendment rights. That is very unfortunate at a time when Canadians across this country are asking for more democracy, at a time when Canadians are saying that what we need to have is more transparency in government.

We have a government that prorogued Parliament for a month, saying that they wanted to reset the agenda and come back with a new agenda. Well, sadly, Mr. Chair, this new agenda seems just as darkly unfortunate and disrespectful of democratic rights as the old agenda was. I think, Mr. Chair, that's a very unfortunate thing.

Now to conclude, because I know there are other members who want to speak, we couldn't support a motion like this. We find it unfortunate that it was presented on Tuesday. We find it unfortunate, now that we have the interpretation, that Conservatives seem to want to try to ram this through.

What we want to do is get to the study that Canadians are asking us to do, to do away with that secretive self-policing in the Board of Internal Economy and put in place the kind of transparency the NDP has always called for with MPs' expenses.

With that, Mr. Chair, I am—

An hon. member: Keep talking to it.

Mr. Peter Julian: —just going to speak for a couple more minutes because I've just realized that I have some additional things I want to bring forward.

An hon. member: It's okay, let's just him speak.

Go ahead, you can finish.

Mr. Peter Julian: Well, okay, Mr. Chair. I've just realized that there are other things that I can add.

Now, Mr. Chair, in the throne speech there was also the comment that we are smart. In referring to all Canadians, Mr. Chair, I would certainly agree that Canadians are profoundly smart and intelligent. They can see through government manipulation.

Now, as for the blunt-headed way this was brought forward Tuesday, thrown onto the floor as if somehow opposition members wouldn't be aware of it, wouldn't understand exactly what the connotations, impacts, and consequences were, that wasn't a smart move, Mr. Chair. That wasn't a smart move at all. What that indeed did, I think, was heighten our suspicion that there was something untoward in the whole approach.

Mr. Chair, I'll say this just one more time. We believe very strongly that we need to proceed to the committee report, as that's what we've been charged to do. Let's do away with the secretive Board of Internal Economy. Let's move forward on transparency of MPs' expenses and let's drop this idea of oppressing non-recognized parties' members of Parliament and suppressing their rights to report stage amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

I have next on my list Monsieur Bellavance, but I'll need to ask the committee for their permission to have Monsieur Bellavance speak today. It's our standard procedure.

Those in favour? Those against?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Monsieur Bellavance, please share your comments with us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That is one example of the issues faced by members of an unrecognized party, and even by independent members, although there is a difference between a member from an unrecognized party and an independent member. Since there are fewer than 12 members of the Bloc Québécois, it is not a recognized party; the same thing applies to Ms. May's party. Independent members have chosen their status, or they have been excluded by their caucus. Whatever the case, the difficulties I was referring to remain the same: the members from an unrecognized party have to ask for the committee's unanimous consent to speak on a topic that concerns them. That is one of the problems we encounter.

I will not take all of the remaining time to discuss this, but I would like to suggest the following: rather than debate a motion on the amendments, I would like the committee to devote a few sessions to studying the rights of members belonging to unrecognized parties, and those of independent members.

To illustrate what I mean, I would like to refer to what happened at the Quebec National Assembly. At the time, the Action démocratique du Québec party, which had four members, was an unrecognized party. The other parties had discussed the possibility of having these members take part in parliamentary committees, which are known as parliamentary commissions in Quebec. That had been accepted. The same thing goes for the party Québec solidaire. At the beginning, that party had only one member; today, it has two. These members also have the opportunity to take part in committee studies, and they have the same rights and privileges as the other members.

I'm not talking about equality here. We understand full well that the Conservative Party is the majority party and that the NDP is the official opposition, and then come the Liberals. We can't have the same speaking time as they do. Our interventions cannot be as long as those of the members of those parties. Nevertheless, we would like the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to examine this question more in depth, and not simply through a single motion.

As for the motion as such, I would simply like the "blues" to reflect what the Bloc Québécois has to say on the matter. I'm going to talk about the inherent rights of all of the members regarding the tabling of amendments. Following the speaker's decision last June, we went to a few committees to submit amendments, but that is all we did. We had the right to submit amendments, and perhaps to a few minutes to present our case. That is where there should be a difference. The motion should be clearer for the members. When amendments are tabled, at least in committees, the members of an unrecognized party and independent members should have the right to answer questions raised by their amendments and to question witnesses. We should also have the right to vote, at least on our own amendments. As you can see I am even limiting our rights there.

Actually, there are two categories of members, the members from a recognized party and the members from an unrecognized party. There are also independent members who are in a second category and do not have the same rights as the others, with all due respect. Of course, the relative weight we have in the House of Commons has to be taken into account. I will never ask to have the same speaking time as the members of the official opposition or the government party, but I would at the very least like to be able to submit arguments on my amendments.

In light of what I have just said, this motion is incomplete. That is all I am going to say for the time being, but that is my party's opinion. I hope that I will be able to take part in your discussions again.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1250)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bellavance.

Next on my list I have Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I think Mr. Christopherson and Mr. Julian articulated well the basis of the government's intentions here, and also the awful nature with which the process has been used. Changing the way we make laws in Canada and in our Parliament without a bit of evidence or argument coming from the government should give everybody pause, and in fact suspicion, including members of the government. When someone brings forward an idea to change things fundamentally and won't back it up, one should be a bit worried: "Please, buy my car. Can I test drive it? No. What's the price? I can't tell you; just buy the car." Most Canadians would walk out of that dealership.

Most Canadians are looking at the shortcuts this government has taken around the inconveniences of democracy—the omnibus bill, stuffing the Senate, and on down the list—and seeing that it all comes back. It's a remarkable natural fact in democracy.

I believe, Chair, this comes out of the discomfort the government had around C-38, their omnibus bill, which was in and of itself an abuse of power in ramming so many things together and pretending they were all one thing and then trying to ram it through Parliament. The fact was one of the independents in Parliament who could not present at a committee, Madam A, then used her privileges to move amendments in the House that ended up causing the government some discomfort because they had to sit there and vote over and over again. I think you remember it well, Chair.

The fact of the matter is the government could avoid all of this mess if they started to actually pay attention and respect our democratic institutions, this place itself. All of these things start to go away because there is decency.

We had a time allocation motion moved this morning, Chair, on a bill in the House that was meant to be debated for five days, which we had agreed to debate for five days. The government's next action was to shut down the debate in five days. It's evidence-based decision-making gone to decision-based evidence-making.

There's no evidence for this argument. Changing laws on the fly is dangerous. We're deeply concerned with what the government is doing. We will resist its attempt to do this.

The Chair: A point of order. Please go ahead.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I apologize to Mr. Cullen for interrupting.

My point of order is simply this. I've heard both the official opposition and Kevin speak of the fact that the study we should be engaged in right now is the study on MP transparency. We do have a House order that suggests we have a deadline of December 2, 2013, on that. So with the greatest respect—and I would need some cooperation from Nathan on this—I think I might have something that can resolve this. I hope I do. It would require unanimous consent, but for me to move that motion, I would need Nathan to cede his time to me.

The Chair: That would work if that happens.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's difficult. I want to hear what the motion actually reads first, but I think that's what Mr. Lukiwski is suggesting.

The Chair: You have a bit of permission. Go ahead.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Let me read the motion, just so we can try to put a cap on this.

The motion is that further debate on the current motion, amendment, and subamendments be deferred to the next meeting, provided that the chair put all questions necessary to dispose of the motion to the committee prior to 12:59 p.m. on that day.

Quite frankly, what that says is that we defer the debate on this. We have a few moments left. We might be able to start at least talking about witnesses and things like that in the few moments we have left for the transparency study. We can go back to this discussion at the next meeting, provided that by the end of the next meeting, if it takes that long, we have a vote on the question before us.

• (1255)

The Chair: Just quickly on your motion, Mr. Lukiwski, it's fine and I'll say it's in order, but there is no subamendment. We have a motion with an amendment, no subamendment.

Mr. Cullen, you still have the floor, sir.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Very briefly, Chair, I think this is something we can see with some significant reluctance. This is not a great process we're engaged in right now. I appreciate the attempts of the government to try to at least advance the study on MPs' expenses, because that is of greater importance I think to all of us, to have consistent rules and to get on with that work.

I will reiterate that all of this could have been avoided. There's no need for this. You simply talk to each other and try to figure out what's best for Parliament and for Canada. That's what gets done. But I will cede my time to allow this motion to be tabled so that we can get on with some other business today and perhaps at our next meeting.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: If you wish, if he's ceding his time to me, may I present the motion?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I sincerely mean this: I thank Nathan for doing that.

I move that further debate on the current motion and amendment be deferred to the next meeting, provided that the chair put all questions necessary to dispose of the motion to the committee prior to 12:59 p.m. on that day.

The Chair: First of all, does Mr. Lukiwski have unanimous consent to propose this motion?

Seeing nobody saying no, great. Now, on Mr. Lukiwski's motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: That gets us off the motion that we were on.

We're now back to a couple of minutes of business, if I can do that.

Madam Turmel, I think I know what you're about to do, but just before you do, I have a couple of pieces of business I'd like to carry on with under the routine proceedings that we were trying to deal with.

First of all, with our study on the Board of Internal Economy and the transparency of MPs' expenses that is coming up, there are a couple of things I have to get out. One of them is the briefing notes that were mentioned earlier that were prepared. I'd love to have the permission of the committee to distribute those. Is anyone opposed to our doing that? I need to ask you because the independent members of our House are mentioned in the motion and these briefing notes are going to them as well, not just to members of the committee but to all the independents because they are truly, while we are discussing it, members of this committee. Great.

I have prepared a letter to the independent members as to what role they will play or how they will participate in the study of the Board of Internal Economy. I know you'd love to see it and that's what I've been trying to get to. The letter simply asks the independents to negotiate among themselves, meet with each other, and decide who is going to sit at this table.

• (1300)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Well, I can't talk to this guy.

The Chair: I know that, but we can't talk to these guys either.

That's basically all the letter says, that the independent members of the House of Commons will decide on their own who would be represented on which day of the committee, that it will only be one member, and those types of things. They would be governed by all the rules of the House. If one is sitting at a meeting in camera, well that's going to be really tough to share with the other members, but those types of things will take place.

Could I have permission to send that letter out to the independents so that we can get this back, because we really can't start until then?

Also on routine motions, this one sounds really silly, but the chair would like permission to be able to get a coffee without putting somebody else in his chair each time, as long as I pay attention in the room.

An hon. member: You're going too far.

The Chair: That's too far? Okay, then the sandwiches and coffee are going to be behind here—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: —and I'll just roll over.

As you know, our study was really to have started by now, and as it has been said, the December 2 deadline is fast, fast approaching. We need to get started. We believe the study needs to start with the Clerk of the House and we've scheduled the Clerk's appearance on November 5. Other people may accompany her that day.

The motion mentioned the Auditor General, so we've taken the liberty of trying to arrange for the Auditor General to be here. We're having some difficulty with the date, but it could work. We'll continue to work on that.

I still need a witness list from all on who else might appear. As you'll notice, we're into a November 5 start with a December 2 finish. This means that the report has to be written and back to the committee by November 28, which means that really, we must finish this before then. We have a very tight timeframe.

Mr. Julian, on that point.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, we've already indicated that we're very favourable to having additional meetings on this. We think that the Canadian public wants to hear back. That means accelerating the meeting schedule as well.

The Chair: That may very well be, but that will take consent of the whole committee to make sure it can happen, including who's available.

We recognize that next week we do not have a meeting on Thursday. I know that for Tuesday, we've now put a motion in place to eat up Tuesday.

An hon. member: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Chair, again, I just remind all my colleagues that the motion says that the question to dispense has to be done prior to the end of the meeting. It doesn't mean that we have to take the entire meeting to debate this. If we can dispense with this within the first half hour, then we would have one-and-a-half hours left to get into things like witnesses and how we want to structure the study.

The Chair: I would like to use part of that meeting, if it's available to us, for steering, for us to know how we're going forward on this study, but it will be up to the committee, of course, as to how we do that.

There are a couple of other pieces of business that I want to cover during that. There is the whole ATIP thing we still have to pass, which we haven't done. We have to do that.

There is the motion of privilege that has come to this committee recently on Elections Canada, which matters, so we need to find time to do that.

It's our role to handle those as quickly as possible.

Mr. Lamoureux, very quickly. We're really running out of time today.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Very quickly, Mr. Chair, how many witnesses do we actually have that we can invite?

The Chair: Two.

Right now, the Auditor General and the clerk are the two who were mentioned in the motion. Nobody else has been invited, because they're still awaiting the final list.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Can we provide additional names then?

The Chair: You can do it, but if there isn't time to see them we'll make a decision on the steering on how to schedule those meetings.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: But as of right now it would be two people on November 5.

The Chair: As quickly as you can.

Madam Turmel.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Chair, before we close...

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm very [*Inaudible—Editor*] but go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: I know we are running out of time, but we nevertheless have to finish our study of the motions of the Board of Internal Economy. I have one to submit. I believe you have been given a copy. This is what it says:

That the committee may meet in camera only for the purpose of discussing:

- (a) wages, salaries and other employee benefits;
- (b) contracts and contract negotiations;
- (c) labour relations and personnel matters;
- (d) a draft report;
- (e) briefings concerning national security; and

That all votes taken in camera be recorded in the *Minutes of Proceedings*, including how each member voted when recorded votes are requested.

I would like to provide a few explanations. Citizens have the right to know. We talk about transparency, democracy and open debate. It is important that citizens be able to know what is discussed in our committee. We know, however, that certain matters have to be debated in camera.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: We are also going to be asking for a vote...

[*English*]

The Chair: Excuse me.

Madam Turmel, I have a point of order and then I've got to go.

Go ahead.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I appreciate the fact that the motion is coming forward. Since we're over time right now, certainly I would say there's going to be a discussion on this.

I, and I believe my government colleagues, have some severe reservations about this motion, which I would welcome going into detail about, but now is not the time since we're already five minutes past our adjournment.

The Chair: If I can help the committee, we have the motion by Mr. Lukiwski of what will happen in the next meeting. I promised that this motion would be delivered and it will be the next thing we discuss before we move on to any other further business.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: That's fine.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, I think the next thing on the order immediately following the vote has to be the study of the committee. I thought that was going to be the next thing on the committee list.

● (1305)

The Chair: Mr. Lamoureux, we're still on routine proceedings for this committee. I've got to go that route, with your knowing now what's hanging over us. We'd love to ensure that we could discuss it all. That's exactly what we'll attempt to do. Your chair will try to move the committee as quickly as we can.

Mr. Lukiwski, one more time.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: The last thing, for the benefit of Kevin and everyone else, quite frankly, on the motion presented by Madam Turmel, we will have one very short speaker on this one. We do not intend to filibuster this motion; we want to come to a vote and get to the study.

The Chair: We can get to it pretty quickly provided we now know how we can do it.

Thank you.

Is there anything else for today?

We are adjourned until Tuesday.

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