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Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Tuesday, February 16, 2016

—
Chair

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1105)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira): 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.

[Translation]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party.

[English]

I'm ready to receive motions for the chair.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): I nominate Borys Wrzesnewskyj as chair of the committee.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Madam Ratansi that Borys Wrzesnewskyj be elected as chair of the committee. Are there any further nominations?

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): I move that nominations be closed.

The Clerk: Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj duly elected chair of the committee.

The Chair (Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): Well, they say timing is everything in life.

We'll proceed with the election of the vice-chairs. Are there any nominations for the positions of vice-chair?

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Chair, I nominate David Tilson as vice-chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there a seconder for the nomination?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: You don't need one.

The Chair: Okay. Are there any other nominations?

Seeing none, nominations are closed, and I congratulate Mr. Tilson.

I look forward to working together. Are there any nominations for the second vice-chair?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I nominate Jenny Kwan.

The Chair: Are there any other nominations?

Seeing no other nominations, I congratulate Ms. Kwan on her election.

We will move now to routine motions. The first motion is for the services of the analysts from the Library of Parliament. It reads:

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 it in its work.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I so move.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there a seconder to the motion?

Mr. David Tilson: I don't think you need any.

The Chair: That's not required. Thank you for that clarification.

Is there any discussion?

The motion is carried.

Mr. David Tilson: On division.

The Chair: Thank you.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next routine motion is for a subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I move:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five (5) members including the Chair, the two (2) vice-chairs and two (2) members of the government; and

That the quorum of the Subcommittee consist of three (3) members and each member of the Subcommittee be permitted to have one assistant attend any meeting of the Subcommittee. In addition, each party be permitted to have one staff member from a House officer attend any meeting.

The Chair: Is there any discussion? Is the motion agreed to?

Mr. David Tilson: On division.

The Chair: Thank you.

(Motion agreed to on division)

The Chair: The next routine motion is on reduced quorum.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): I move:

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence published when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three (3) members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the government

The Chair: Are we agreed?

Mr. David Tilson: On division.

The Chair: Thank you.

(Motion agreed to on division)

The Chair: The next routine motion is on statements by witnesses and their questioning. It is that the witnesses from any one organization shall be allowed 10 minutes to make their opening statements.

I believe everyone has a copy, so you can take a look at the rotation by time. Is it necessary to read through it?

Mr. David Tilson: No, it's not, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): I so move.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. David Tilson: That is on division.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. David Tilson: We're not there yet.

The Chair: The next motion, on distribution of documents, states that only the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute to the members of the committee any documents, including—

Mr. David Tilson: Excuse me. We just voted on statements by witnesses.

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. David Tilson: Then we're now onto the sequence for the questions to witnesses.

The Chair: That rotation was part of the same motion.

Mr. David Tilson: Oh, I'm sorry. Then we do wish to discuss that motion. I thought that was a separate heading. I apologize. Mr. Chairman, that's the only one on which we're raising discussion, quite frankly, and I ask that you bring that one back.

•(1110)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Sure. Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. David Tilson: That was my mistake, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry.

The Chair: That's not a problem.

We're all a little rushed because of the weather this morning.

Mr. David Tilson: Yes.

I assume there's a motion by someone to...

The Chair: I believe it was by Ms. Zahid.

Mr. David Tilson: Perhaps you should read out the motion, then.

The Chair: Okay. It reads as follows:

That the witnesses from any one organization shall be allowed ten (10) minutes to make their opening statement; and,

That the order of questions for the first round be as follows: Conservative, six (6) minutes, Liberal, six (6) minutes, New Democratic Party, six (6) minutes, Liberal, six (6) minutes; and,

That the order of questions for the second round be as follows: Liberal, six (6) minutes, Conservative, six (6) minutes, Liberal, six (6) minutes, Conservative, five (5) minutes, New Democratic Party, three (3) minutes.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, could we make an amendment to that motion on the rotation by time?

The amendment would be, for round one, that the Liberals would have seven minutes, the Conservative Party seven minutes, the New Democratic Party seven minutes, and the Liberal Party seven minutes.

For round two, the Conservative Party would have five minutes, the Liberal Party five minutes, the Conservative Party five minutes, the Liberal Party five minutes, and the New Democratic Party three minutes.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on this?

Mr. David Tilson: We believe that's a fair procedure. It's closer to what this committee has had in the past. In the past, for round one the governing party had seven minutes, the official opposition had seven minutes, the New Democratic Party had five minutes, and the governing party had seven minutes. We believe this is fairer than the six minutes that's being suggested in the motion, as well as for the second round. Of course, at the end, if by chance we finished round one and round two, it would revert to the first round.

The Chair: The motion is for a total of 50 minutes. Your amendment would increase that to 51 minutes for the first two rounds. Would anyone like...?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: They're both 50 minutes, right? You're not changing the total time.

The Chair: Yes, there is a change in total time. That's what I'm pointing out. The net effect would be the Conservatives would gain one minute.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Oh, okay.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to speak in support of the amendment. I know that it does add one extra minute to our total allotted time, but given the significance and magnitude of this file, I think if we can spare that one extra minute, it's certainly worth our while to do so.

I also appreciate allowing the NDP, me, to have an extra minute in that regard.

Again, this is a significant file. I think the Prime Minister has made it very clear that he wants Parliament to function in a cooperative, collaborative fashion. Whenever we can, we can offer suggestions on how we can tackle the challenges ahead. I hope the committee members will support the amendment so that we can have a good start and get to work on this important portfolio.

Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Would anyone else like to comment?

●(1115)

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, perhaps I could just add this. As I understand it, PROC has discussed the format of these routine motions, and this proposal that I've put forward in an amendment has been agreed upon for most of the committees, if not all, and it has been agreed to by all three parties at PROC.

That's the basis of the amendment. It's to build a standard format for all of the committees.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tilson.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I think we're in agreement with my colleagues here that we will agree with the NDP's suggestions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tabbara.

Is there unanimous consent on this? It appears so.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

Mr. David Tilson: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, for allowing us to hear that again.

The Chair: We'll move on.

The next routine motion is distribution of documents.

That only the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to distribute to the members of the Committee any documents, including motions, and that all documents which have to be distributed amongst Committee members must be in both official languages. The Clerk shall advise all witnesses appearing before the Committee of this requirement.

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: So moved.

The Chair: On division?

Mr. David Tilson: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to on division)

The Chair: Thank you.

The next one is on working meals. It reads:

That the Committee hereby authorize the Clerk of the Committee, in consultation with the Chair, to make the necessary arrangements to provide for working meals as may be required and that the cost of those meals be charged to the Committee budget.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Next is witnesses' expenses. The motion reads:

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses, not exceeding two (2) representatives per organization; and that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the Chair.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: So moved.

The Chair: Thank you. Discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next one is staff at in camera meetings. It reads:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each Committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff person at an *in camera* meeting and in addition to that, one person from either the Whip's office, the House Leader's office, or the research bureau of each party.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I so move.

The Chair: Thank you. Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next is on in camera meeting transcripts. It reads:

That one copy of the transcript of each *in camera* meeting be kept in the office of the Clerk of the Committee for consultation by members of the Committee or the member's staff person present at the meeting.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: So moved.

The Chair: Thank you.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next one is on notice of motion. It reads:

That 48 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the Committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration; and that the notice of motion be filed with the Clerk of the Committee and distributed to members in both official languages. Completed translated motions that are received by 4 p.m. shall be distributed to members the same day.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I so move.

The Chair: Thank you.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you for the routine motions.

I thought perhaps we might take this opportunity to have a general conversation/discussion about some of the items we might be looking at as we move forward.

I know that certain committees at times have invited the minister to appear before the committee to set out what the government's agenda might be and what their priorities may be. It's at the discretion of the committee to issue an invitation to the minister, but I put that out.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Agreed.

Mr. David Tilson: Agreed to what?

The Chair: We don't have a motion on the table. I'm just putting this out to the committee: should we consider perhaps moving to issue an invitation to the minister to appear before the committee?

●(1120)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I believe it probably would be best to have a committee meeting to discuss business with the full committee, at your earliest call.

The Chair: Mr. Chen.

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I think it's very important for us to know what the government's plan is and to know the commitments of the minister moving forward. I would be pleased to move a motion to invite the minister to the next meeting of the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chen.

Go ahead, Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, normally the committee is the master of its own house. We don't do the bidding of the minister. We don't ask the minister to put forward issues. We decide ourselves. When bills come forward, obviously there are obligations that we study those bills and make our reports to the House, but if no bills come forward, either government or private bills, we raise issues and topics ourselves.

I just find it kind of strange, sir, that we would ask the minister to come forward and tell our committee what we're going to study. I hope that's not what you're suggesting. It's normally the case with all committees that we're independent of the government. We're independent. We make our own decisions on what we're going to study. The minister may come, obviously, when the topic of estimates or supplementary estimates comes forward. The minister and the staff normally come and make presentations to the committee. We make our comments. We vote on those supplementary estimates and estimates.

When studies were made in the committees that I have sat on, we'd normally invite the minister and the staff to come forward and give us comments on those particular areas of study. The same process goes with bills.

I say this through you, Mr. Chairman, to the mover of the motion, that it's most unusual, in asking the minister to come, to imply that the minister would make suggestions on what this committee will study. We decide, not the minister, what we'll study.

I would ask that the member reconsider that position. If the government members have some topics they wish to bring forward, we could do that perhaps at the next meeting, which would be Thursday. I would think it would be more appropriate that we come and debate what we will be doing then.

Since there are no bills at this stage, and there won't be for a while, because both government bills and private bills have to go through second reading, we will be making a study of a particular area. There are all kinds of issues. This is a very difficult portfolio, and there are all kinds of issues that we could study.

If we're not prepared this morning to discuss what topics we'll deal with, I would suggest that in fact we do that on Thursday.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tilson.

Ms. Kwan is next.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to support the motion. I think it would be valuable for the committee to have the minister present and to make a presentation to the committee, and of course the committee members would be able to ask him questions. It should be made clear to him that this is not the only time we would like him to appear before the committee, and we can adjust the amendment accordingly. I wouldn't want the minister to think that this is the only time he will be able to find time in his very busy schedule to come before the committee.

Subsequent to that, as the committee gets under way with the work we will have planned, I assume some of that work will go before the minister, but we can request his attendance at this meeting. If he is unable to accommodate us, I think it would be very

unfortunate. Then I fear the work of the committee would be severely limited in that regard.

We could ensure in that communication to the minister—and perhaps this is a friendly amendment to the motion—that we clearly outline that this is the opening opportunity for the minister to offer his comments, but that it not be considered the only time when it would be important for the minister to appear before this committee. I think it's very important that we state that clearly as well.

• (1125)

The Chair: Mr. Chen.

Mr. Shaun Chen: Can we take friendly amendments? I'm happy to do that, but could you repeat it for me?

The Chair: I request that we have the motion clarified and read back along with the friendly amendment. Thank you.

The Clerk: The motion reads as follows:

That the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship be invited to appear before the committee at the next meeting.

Mr. Shaun Chen: Can I speak to the motion?

The Chair: Ms. Rempel was next on the speakers' list.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

I suggest that we could clarify the content of the motion to be the mandate letter that he was given by the Prime Minister for the file, which I think is the intent of what my colleague is putting forward. I support my colleague's component with regard to future invitations, and I'd also wonder if the government would support inviting department officials to attend with the minister.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much. I'm just processing the wording of the friendly amendment, and I thank the clerk's office very much in producing that in quick order here, but maybe I didn't make myself as clear as I could have.

Just to clarify, I think it is important to note the distinction between “as required” and “the committee's desire”. It certainly is my view, and I won't speak for the rest of the committee members, that I desire the minister to reappear before this committee, and not “as required”.

I know that we would need the minister to reappear before this committee once we have our work schedule organized. Could we amend the motion to reflect that, rather than saying “as required”? “As required” is very loose terminology, if you will, and I meant it to be a little more of a directive and to say that it is the committee's desire for the minister to reappear once we have our work schedule organized.

The Chair: I can see the clerk busily making notes.

• (1130)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry at this lack of clarity on my first round.

The Chair: We'll take a moment and allow the clerk to get the wording down.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thanks very much.

The Chair: The motion reads as follows:

That the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and Departmental Officials be invited to the next meeting or at his earliest convenience in order to discuss the ministerial mandate letter; and that the Minister and officials be invited back at the Committee's request.

Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: I have a question, Mr. Chairman, for Mr. Virani.

Is the minister available on Thursday?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): I am not aware of whether he is available on Thursday. He's currently out of the country, but I'm not sure if he'll be back on Thursday.

The Chair: Just for clarification, it does say at the "earliest convenience".

Mr. David Tilson: That could be two months from now.

To Mr. Virani, I understand if he's not available on Thursday, but "his earliest convenience" could mean anything. It could mean—

The Chair: I think the word "earliest" clarifies that.

Mr. David Tilson: Really? We'll hold you to that, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tilson.

We have the motion before us. Do we have unanimous consent?

Mr. Shaun Chen: Mr. Chair, I wanted to speak to it.

I absolutely support the motion as amended. I think it's very important for us to hear from the minister. It will help us determine and set an agenda moving forward. By no means does it mean we are using what the minister is saying as our agenda. I absolutely agree

with Ms. Rempel that this is an opportunity for us to examine the issues that the minister can bring forward through the mandate letter.

I believe the wording is good, because it allows us to work with the minister to find a time that's convenient, and hopefully as soon as possible. Obviously, the parliamentary secretary is not his scheduling assistant and would not know the minister's schedule.

I look forward to this conversation, and I hope that the committee supports it.

The Chair: Thank you.

If there are no further comments, it appears we have unanimous consent.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there anything else on the agenda for today?

Perhaps the two vice-chairs could stay behind after the meeting and we could discuss a convenient time for the subcommittee to have its first meeting.

If there is no other business, someone could move to close the meeting.

Mr. Shaun Chen: I so move.

The Chair: Mr. Chen, thank you. It's unanimous.

The meeting is adjourned.

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