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—
Chair

Mr. Paul Steckle

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Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Tuesday, October 12, 2004

• (1535)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee: Honourable members of the committee, I see that we have a quorum. We can now proceed with the election of the chair.

[Translation]

Are there any nominations?

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Are you ready for motions, Madam Chair?

I move that Paul Steckle be chair of the agriculture committee.

The Clerk: Are there any other nominations? Nominations are closed.

The motion as proposed by Mr. Easter is that the chair of the committee be Mr. Paul Steckle.

Is there agreement?

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

The Clerk: If there are no objections, we will now proceed with the election of the Vice-Chairs.

[English]

The first nomination would be for the official opposition vice-chairman. Do we have nominations?

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): I nominate Gerry Ritz.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Are there any other nominations?

Some hon. members: No.

The Clerk: Mr. Anderson moves that Mr. Gerry Ritz be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee.

[English]

Is there agreement?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare that Mr. Ritz is the official opposition vice-chair.

[Translation]

We will now proceed to elect a Vice-Chair for the other opposition party.

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): I nominate Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard.

The Clerk: Are there any other nominations?

Some hon. members: No.

The Clerk: Mr. Gaudet moves that Ms. Poirier-Rivard be elected Vice-Chair.

[English]

Is there agreement?

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

The Clerk: I therefore declare Ms. Poirier-Rivard elected Vice-Chair for the other opposition party.

[English]

I invite Mr. Steckle to please chair the meeting.

The Chair (Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.)): Before we get into the business at hand in this very short meeting, I do want to thank my nominator as well as my colleagues on both sides of the table for their support and continued confidence in my leadership of this committee. Obviously we have had some experience with quite a number of you, but there are others who are new, and we welcome you here.

I thought it would be favourable for all of us to understand and know each other a little better because we are going to be working together. Perhaps we could go around the table very quickly—the new members will not know us so well—so that we can know the newer members. If you could, just introduce yourselves very briefly with some of your background.

Gerry, will you start?

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): My background is in agriculture, and of course I have all the off-farm jobs to pay for that nasty habit, as does everybody else at this time and place. I've enjoyed working with the committee over the last year—we have put forward a couple of very well accepted reports—and I look forward to that type of working relationship again.

Mr. David Anderson: My name is David Anderson. I'm from southwest Saskatchewan. I am a producer and have been for about 30 years. I'm a second-term MP. I was involved with the agriculture committee in the last go-round, and I am the official critic for the Canadian Wheat Board as well this time.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): I am James Bezan. I'm representing Selkirk—Interlake. I have taken over from Howard Hilstrom, who served on this committee. Like Howard, I am a cattle farmer. Actually I live only about ten miles from Howard. This BSE thing has definitely hit us right between the eyes, and it's an issue that's close to my heart.

I'm looking forward to working on the committee.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): I'm Larry Miller. I'm from mid-western Ontario, Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. We have the largest beef-producing riding in Ontario. I'm a beef farmer as well, and I may have a bunch of cows for sale if this job gets any busier.

I'm very happy to be working here with all of you. I'd like to congratulate the chair and the vice-chairs. I look for great things coming out of here.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Rivard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Good day. I'm Denise Poirier-Rivard, a goat farmer and producer. I raise registered purebred goats under the official milk recording service as well as operate a processing and interpretation centre. I'm from Saint-Isidore-Laprairie and this is my first mandate as MP and Agriculture critic.

I'd like to extend my congratulations to the Chair and Vice-Chair. It is a pleasure to serve with you. Thank you.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: My name is Roger Gaudet, MP for Montcalm. This was my second election victory in a little less than two years. I represent a region that is 80 per cent agricultural and I have worked extensively with the core unions and the Lanaudière UPA. I hope that I can work toward furthering the cause of agriculture. Thank you.

• (1540)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): I'm Charlie Angus from Timmins—James Bay. The southern part of my riding is probably second to yours in terms of beef production, along with large dairy production. We share the neighbouring region of Abitibi—Témiscamingue. Both regions are very dependent on agriculture, and I'm here to represent those interests.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Drouin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Drouin (Beauce, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to congratulate you and the two vice-chairs for being unanimously selected to fill these positions.

This is my third term as the Member for Beauce. Agriculture is vitally important to my riding and I'm delighted to be a member of this committee. You can count on my full cooperation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Kilgour.

Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, Lib.): I'm from a city riding primarily, but my wife and I used to raise bees. We used to joke that we had 10 million employees. We had 100 hives, which produced about 4 tonnes of honey a year.

I am from Alberta, as my colleagues know, and BSE is an absolutely crucial issue to tens of thousands of people across Canada.

The Chair: Ms. Ur.

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): I'm Rose-Marie Ur, and I'm a fourth-term MP from southwestern Ontario. I live on the family farm and presently do cash crop farming.

I look forward to a good productive committee like we've had over the last several years.

The Chair: Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I'm Wayne Easter, and my riding is Malpeque, Prince Edward Island. Previously I was a dairy, beef, and grain producer. I was president of the National Farmers Union for 11 years, so I appeared as a witness before many agriculture committees for years.

I would hope that as a committee we can challenge the issues and challenge the government when necessary. I think that's our job. Hopefully we can work together as a committee to achieve some results on the ground in the farm community, because that's our purpose in being here.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Easter.

I'm Paul Steckle, your new chair. I'm a lifelong farmer and a four-term member. I have sat on this committee most of my 11 years here. I have also sat on the fisheries and oceans committee, but I have spent most of my time on the agricultural committee.

I look forward to working with you. I want to believe that we can work together and that we can build consensus around the table even though we start from different points. We have to, as a government in a minority situation. I realize that the majority I count on is on my left, and I will be doing so from time to time to seek progress and movement on issues that all of us would agree are important. I look forward to working with my new vice-chairs and all of you as we move forward from today.

We have a number of matters of routine business that have to be attended to.

I will just indicate at the outset that it would be my wish, unless you direct the chair otherwise, that a committee of the whole be the steering committee. There are two reasons for that. One, of course, is that we always have sufficient numbers to hold a steering committee meeting. Two, I think all members should contribute in an in camera environment toward the direction of this committee and the work it needs to do. Unless it is otherwise indicated, we will move in that direction.

The first motion is to retain the services of the Library of Parliament, as we have always done in the past: that the committee retain the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament, as needed, to assist the committee in its work, at the discretion of the chair.

An hon. member: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1545)

The Chair: The second motion deals with the issue I just raised. It establishes a subcommittee on agenda and procedure, which is the steering committee. The motion is that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be composed of the chair, the two vice-chairs, and a member of the other opposition party.

I have suggested that we change that to include the whole committee, because we are going to be very busy in this Parliament due to the numbers. I'd like to use the prerogative of the chair to point us in that direction, unless I am otherwise directed. I think it's important.

Mr. Larry Miller: I so move.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Chair, I have no problem with that, but previously we removed the parliamentary secretary as a voting member on that, so that there was a disconnect with the minister. I know and trust Wayne. But I wondered if we want to review that point.

The Chair: Given the fact that we have fewer numbers on this side, we would find it appropriate to have at least four members from this side. Would that be a fair statement at this point in time?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We have a motion to receive and publish evidence in the absence of a quorum: that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive and publish evidence when a quorum is not present, provided that at least five members are present, including one member of the opposition.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The motion on the allocation of time for questioning supports the time limits we had in the last session, and I think it worked very well. The motion is that witnesses be given up to ten minutes for their opening statement; that at the discretion of the chair, during the questioning of the witnesses, there be allocated seven minutes for the first questioner of each party; and that thereafter five minutes be allocated to each subsequent questioner, alternating between government and opposition parties.

Do you have a question, Ms. Poirier-Rivard?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Poirier-Rivard: I'd like to make one small amendment so that the motion reads as follows: That witnesses be given 10 minutes for their opening statement; that during the first round of questioning, there be allocated 10 minutes for the first questioner of each opposition party, and that an equivalent amount of time be allocated to the first questioner from the Government party; and that thereafter questioners alternate between the opposition and government parties, at the discretion of the Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: On the first rounds, let me do this very slowly, just so that we understand. The parties that are coming before the table to give witness are given ten minutes. Mind you, at times we have to give more time than that for them to put their issue clearly before the committee.

Then I begin with the official opposition, with seven minutes. I then move to, in this case, the Bloc for another seven minutes, and then I move back to the Liberal side for seven minutes. Then I move back to the NDP, in this case to Mr. Angus, for the last seven minutes.

I then move to the official opposition again for five minutes, and from then on it's back and forth, five minutes.

Is that understood? At one time we didn't do it that way, but the motion says back and forth, and that's the way we did it for the last couple of months. But I was in error—

Mr. Gerry Ritz: We lose our rotation a little bit then. The NDP is going to end up with the same amount of questions as we have when we run out of time, and we have four members sitting at the table.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Once the member's turn has passed, that member will not get have another one until everyone else has had an opportunity to ask questions.

[*English*]

Hon. David Kilgour: Mr. Chair, could we divide the questioning according to the number of seats that the parties have at the table? That would be fair, wouldn't it?

The Chair: We had a different composition in the last Parliament, and that created a little different situation. We will have to play this fair.

Now, I see what you're getting at, and I agree with you, Mr. Ritz, that this would be inappropriate. I think Mr. Angus would probably agree that it would be fair that the party with four members at the table, versus one, should have at least adequate time, if time permits, in a given meeting, for all members...and I've always attempted to do that. I've found agreement among members that when they've spoken and have a second opportunity to speak, they forgo that opportunity on behalf of someone else, to give someone else an opportunity to speak. As your chair, I will ascertain that kind of decorum in terms of having our membership speak.

Or is there a better way of doing it? We could come back on the first round and allow for two questioners. The problem is that if we don't allow for at least the first series of questioners, by the time you get down to the end of your meeting the questions have all been asked. And I think it's fair that all parties are given some opportunity to ask some relevant questions rather than having to repeat something that's been said before.

Mr. Easter.

• (1550)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, I think it's important that before some people who are in attendance at the committee meeting get a second round of questioning, all those who are there have the opportunity to have at least one question first. I think that's one of the difficulties as you go down the rotation.

So I think the motion that was made, or the procedure that was held before, is fine if it's with the understanding that all those present have the opportunity to put one question before you go to, for some, a second round.

The Chair: Okay.

Is that understood, that before we go to a second round of questioning, before Mr. Ritz would be allowed to speak a second time, all members would be given an opportunity to speak? It would be the same thing for the Bloc.

Hon. David Kilgour: How are you going to word that motion?

The Chair: That's why we have clerks.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Could you repeat that, Mr. Chairman? There will be allocated seven minutes for the official opposition...

[English]

The Chair: Seven minutes, but only one person from every party speaks for seven minutes. Thereafter, it's five minutes for each one. What we're saying is that Mr. Ritz could not come back for a second question until all members, including the two from the Bloc, and the three others, if there are three others here.... We don't often have all members here. Today we do. I'd like to see that at every meeting.

Mr. Gaudet.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: If I understand correctly, Mr. Angus will have two opportunities to ask questions, just like the Bloc Québécois members. We will each have one round, and then he'll go first in the subsequent round.

[English]

The Chair: Only after the others have—

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Will he be the last questioner? I want to be clear on this. If he is the first questioner in the second round, he will have had two opportunities to speak, like us.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Gaudet would come last in the first round, with his seven minutes, and he would likely be the fourth speaker, at the earliest, in the next round.

Perhaps we can insert the words, as directed by the clerk, "that before the second round, other members who wish to speak may do so". You would indicate to the chair your wish to speak. I would take it under consideration. You would be given that opportunity before we went back to the people who had spoken previously. You will have accommodation. But it's impossible for me to predict. If every person commits to being here for every meeting, then we could predict today in what order you will speak, if you wish to. But given that we might have only two here from the official opposition and two from the government side, if we have quorum, we can have a meeting. So quorum may only be seven people.

Mr. Miller.

Mr. Larry Miller: I wonder if you should add after those words "to a maximum of five minutes".

The Chair: It already says that.

Mr. Larry Miller: Is it clear enough?

The Chair: Yes. It says that each subsequent questioner will have five minutes.

Mr. Larry Miller: Could we have the whole motion read again.

The Chair: I'll ask the clerk to read it.

The Clerk: The motion is that witnesses be given up to ten minutes for their opening statement; that at the discretion of the chair, during the questioning of the witnesses there be allocated seven minutes for the first questioner of each party; that before the second round, other members who wish to speak may do so; and that thereafter five minutes be allocated to each subsequent questioner, alternating between government and opposition parties.

The Chair: There is just one little quirk in there. We haven't said that we wouldn't continue with the seven minutes. Not everyone is given seven minutes. There is one round of seven minutes.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: There is one other little quirk, Mr. Chairman. Will we be notifying witnesses that they have 10 minutes? A lot of them get here and read for half an hour. Perhaps we can give them a heads-up and tell them to give us the crib notes because 10 minutes is it.

• (1555)

The Chair: That would be directed toward the clerk, but it's also the chair's responsibility to make sure we keep them to that time limit where possible.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion is that except for amendments to bills, 48-hours' notice be given before any substantive motion is considered by the committee and that the motion be filed with the clerk of the committee and circulated to members in both official languages. Upon receipt of the notice, the clerk shall put the motion on the agenda of the committee's next meeting.

That procedure has been in practice here for a long time. The only exception to that is where we can do something because we have received the unanimous consent of the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion deals with in camera meetings: that one copy of the transcript of all in camera meetings be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee; and that unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to have one staff person present at in camera meetings.

Are there any questions on this matter? It has been the practice to allow one staff person to accompany a member for the purpose of putting questions to the table and reporting back to the member.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next motion has to do with the payment of witnesses' travel and living expenses: that if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation, and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses, not exceeding one representative per organization, and that in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be at the discretion of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure.

This again is a procedural practice we have followed in the past.

Mr. Miller.

Mr. Larry Miller: Does this mean, for example, that if the president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association wanted to come to our meeting, we would pay his expenses to come here? Is that how I should read that? Is it if we call them as witnesses?

The Chair: Yes, if we call them as a witness. If they wish to meet with us, they come on their own. I think that serves the right purpose.

It has been correctly pointed out that we don't have a subcommittee, so it should read at the end, "at the discretion of the committee".

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On the distribution of documents with translation, the motion reads: that the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute to the members of the committee documents only when they exist in both official languages.

Again, that's common practice. The only time there have been exceptions to that is if there has been....

Yes, Mr. Gaudet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: The seventh motion provides that the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to distribute to the members of the Committee documents only when they exist in both official languages.

If there are no objections, I would like to add the following words: "and that no document submitted by a witness be distributed without the authorization of the Clerk".

[*English*]

The Chair: That has basically been the practice. We can't put them on the table unless they're in both languages—unless you agree to do so. Again, that serves the same purpose as our other issues where unanimous consent would be required. It hasn't often been forthcoming. It has happened only occasionally, once or twice.

Yes, Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: In the past, witnesses have been allowed to distribute their documents in one language, though, off the table.

The Chair: I guess that would apply in your case too, but not on the table. We can't really control what goes off the table. That is not our jurisdiction.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: That's my concern. Moreover, if documents must be submitted to the Clerk, then the Clerk will be obligated to have them translated. That's why I'm asking that they be submitted directly to the Clerk who would then distribute them to committee members.

[*English*]

The Chair: And that has been the practice.

The clerk is the distributor of matters that come to the table. It's part of the record, so that's included in that.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On working meals: that the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide for working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

I don't know what our schedule will be. A meeting could be from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., or it could be from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. If it's the latter, we usually have food brought in. But we don't know those terms yet.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1600)

The Chair: The last motion is with regard to in camera meetings and transcripts: that one copy of the transcript of all in camera meetings be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: That's a double. At the very top of the page, the first paragraph says exactly that.

The Chair: I thought the words looked familiar. How soon we forget. Thanks for reminding us, Gerry.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, there are a couple of other motions that I think should be attached. One is a review of order in council appointments. As a committee, we should have the right to screen some of these folks, or at least chat with them, to find out the requirements. We didn't cover the estimates, main or supplementary, or bringing the minister before the committee.

The Chair: Those are matters of business that would come before the steering committee.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: You don't want to make it part of a motion?

The Chair: No, I really can't do that today, given that's not part of the original...unless there is agreement all around to do this.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Chair, it seems to me that at the fisheries committee we did this, that it was standard policy. We didn't necessarily review every order in council appointment, but the list of order in council appointments came to committee members as a matter of course, and then the subcommittee decided whether or not they wanted people to come forward.

Certainly the clerk should be notified of order in council appointments, and the committee should have a copy of those appointments. Then we can decide.

The Chair: Basically, that was something that we had agreed on here about six months ago. We had a list, and we agreed as a committee.

So yes, I would entertain that if there is no dissension on that issue.

Hon. David Kilgour: Didn't we agree that if any member of the committee wanted to look at an appointment we would do it, and if nobody on any side of the table wanted to do it then we wouldn't bother?

The Chair: That was the consensus at that time, and that would still apply. We wouldn't necessarily want to see every appointment that's being made, but there are some we would want to see. Any member should be free to bring forward a request to do that, and we would have to hear it.

Was there anything else?

Mr. Gerry Ritz: On committee reports by the Auditor General, do we need a motion to the effect as well, that we would call her in to chat with us?

The Chair: That is a matter of business that would come before the steering committee.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: If we could add those three to our mandate, it would cover them off.

The Chair: On the estimates. Okay

Are there any other matters to come before the chair today?

Hon. David Kilgour: Mr. Chair, if memory serves—it's a long time since the election—didn't we agree that our people retained by the committee to look at the documents of the three packing plants would do a review and we would hear about that? What's the situation on that, if I may ask, please?

The Chair: Again, no one has heard. Certainly I have not heard any progress on that. Obviously that's something we would want to raise at the very earliest....

If I have concurrence by members today, we will go in camera immediately if you wish to do that, and we can discuss some of these things. Is there agreement that we go in camera?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes, and we will continue in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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