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Tuesday, June 21, 2005

—
Chair

The Honourable Don Boudria

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• (1140)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.)): Order, please.

I'm told that the public broadcasting has been turned on.

[Translation]

Ms. Picard, would you care to move the adoption of the draft report?

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): I so move, Mr. Chairman.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Guimond moves that the Chair, Clerk and researchers be authorized to make such grammatical and editorial changes as may be necessary without changing the substance of the report.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[English]

The Chair: Next is that the chair present the report to the House. That's moved by Mr. Johnston.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, that ends consideration of that particular document.

There is one more issue relating to last week. Colleagues will recall that last week we made a report to the House on the subject of electoral reform. By inadvertence, at least on my part—and perhaps on the part of all of us, but I'll let you decide—we didn't put in our report that we wanted the government to respond. Do you wish me to submit an amended report adding that clause?

It's a procedural thing only. It doesn't affect the content. But here's what we would have to do in order to make it happen. Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the committee's 43rd report on electoral reform presented to the House on Thursday, June 16, 2005.

[Translation]

That, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee request that the Government table a comprehensive response to the Committee's 43rd report on electoral reform, presented to the House on Thursday June 16, 2005.

We have neglected to do so and I apologize for the oversight. Should we adopt the motion requesting a response from the government? It would be standard procedure.

Ms. Pauline Picard: I so move, Mr. Chairman.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

The Chair: We also have before us this morning the issue of Standing Order 108(3)(a). As you know, the chair of the Liaison Committee has asked that committees be able to travel without asking the House.

Hon. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Oshawa, Lib.): That's only when the House is not in session.

The Chair: Its not when the House is not in session; it's when the House is not sitting. It's a rather controversial step to get into, but I shouldn't editorialize. What's the opinion of members in that regard?

Monsieur Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): [*Editor's Note: Inaudible*]... of the House.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield: This is something the Liaison Committee has been studying, and that committee is made up of chairs of all the standing committees of the House who have taken this into consideration with their own respective committees. I think they're asking for a trial period. Given that they have done that consultation with all the chairs in all the committees, and they agreed this was something they'd like to do, I think we should concur.

The Chair: Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): I really don't see what the problem is with the procedure as it stands now. I don't know of a case—unless I can be corrected—where a committee has been denied legitimate travel. I guess it's the old “if it ain't broke, why fix it” sort of thing.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Guimond, have you had time to review this file?

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Yes, and I think we should maintain the status quo.

The Chair: Fine then. Now that people have had an opportunity to comment, I'd like to say something, if that's all right.

Personally, if we wish to amend the standing orders—and I'm not saying that we should because I'm not convinced either that they need fixing—we need to find some middle ground. We could agree that motions authorizing a committee to travel are immediately deemed votable when moved in the House. Right now, such motions are debatable and votable. Time allocation and closure must be invoked before they can be adopted.

They, on the other hand, would like to dispense with seeking the House's authorization. That's going from one extreme to the other. Perhaps a more balanced approach would be to make such motions votable, but not debatable. In other words, they would be put to a vote immediately. This would be a far less radical approach than what the Liaison Committee is proposing, but again, I'm not convinced that this is necessary.

• (1145)

[English]

Are you ready to vote on this?

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, even if we agree with your proposal, a debate would still be needed to gauge and challenge people's opinions. If we adopt the motion, there still should be a half-hour or one-hour debate to give all Members the chance to speak to the motion. I'm not at all comfortable with the idea of completely dispensing with debate. Someone could move a motion at the last minute and we would have no idea of what we're voting on. We might not be able to do justice to an issue. We can talk about this later.

The Chair: Fine.

[English]

Would someone move that we reject this proposal?

Yes, Monsieur Reid.

(Motion agreed to on division)

The Chair: We've dealt with these two items. This is all we have on the agenda for this morning, except for scheduling a Thursday meeting, if that is your wish. Can I start by asking if it is your wish to have a meeting on Thursday morning?

Mr. Dale Johnston: I'm going to be here.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: I'd be happy not to have one.

The Chair: Not to have a meeting.

[English]

What is the wish of the committee?

Why don't I tell you what is on the list, and you can decide?

You do have a number of reports from Mr. Kingsley to deal with. We could do that Thursday morning, or we could just say that it's a Thursday morning and it's a long weekend and maybe you don't want a meeting. I'm not trying to put words in your mouth here.

Mr. Dale Johnston: Is any of this stuff urgent?

The Chair: No. I don't see anything as being urgent.

Mr. Dale Johnston: Well, we certainly don't need to meet just for the sake of having a meeting.

The Chair: Okay.

Now, if we do sit starting July 4, the other alternative.... I'm not saying it's going to happen. That's not for me to say; I'm not in that tent anymore. Madam Chief Government Whip, the next time we could sit after this week would be starting July 4—is that it? There's no proposal to sit next week, is there?

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Yes, it's next week. It will be the June 28.

The Chair: It's both. All right, the 28th.

Okay, let me reword that, then. If we sit next week, starting June 28, do you wish to have a committee meeting next week?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Okay, so what I'll do is leave future meetings in abeyance for a few days, and if it looks like we're going to be sitting for an extended period, maybe I could phone both vice-chairs and we could discuss having additional meetings. Is that an appropriate process?

Yes, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): That sounds like a good process to me.

I was just thinking that any future meetings will probably happen in the context of uncertainty as to when the House will rise—it could be immediate or take longer—which suggests to me that the business we ought to try to take care of would be items that could be dealt with in a single meeting as opposed to anything that would require extended attention. I don't know if everybody else has the same problem I have, but I tend to lose track of things as time goes on, so that would strike me as being the most effective way of using our time efficiently.

The Chair: Okay.

If that happens, and of course following the excellent suggestion made to us by Mr. Reid, would you wish to deal with one of the reports by Mr. Kingsley?

Hon. Judi Longfield: I have a point of clarification, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Madam Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield: What about the things like members' domain, order in council reviews, and countdown clock? You haven't mentioned those. You're into future—

The Chair: Those are all on the list, and the list has been circulated to everyone. I'm just trying to get a sense, if the committee sits for additional weeks, of whether there are any of these you would want us—

Hon. Judi Longfield: Can we do some of them now?

• (1150)

The Chair: We can't do them on Thursday because we've agreed not to sit.

Hon. Judi Longfield: I mean today. On the countdown clock, Mr. Godin has—

The Chair: We haven't circulated any documents for members to look at.

I suggest that today we schedule for the future but not actually do topics, because members have not been prepared. Sometimes some of these issues require consultations with caucus, colleagues, and so on.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Picard.

Ms. Pauline Picard: We're spinning our wheels, Mr. Chairman. Just where exactly are we going with this? Technically, there are no committee meetings scheduled for next week. Why not defer this matter until the fall?

The Chair: I totally...

Ms. Pauline Picard: Under normal circumstances, no committee meetings would be scheduled.

The Chair: Fine then. We can schedule a meeting if an urgent matter arises. You've looked at this list and determined that there is nothing urgent to attend to. I imagine that's what you're trying to tell me.

Ms. Pauline Picard: Right now, the House is in session until midnight. We're not in great shape to attend to committee business the following day.

The Chair: So then, if an urgent matter arises next week, I will consult with the two vice-chairs and we will set a date and time for a

meeting. Otherwise, we'll dispense with a meeting. What do you think?

[*English*]

Mr. Johnston, what do you think of that?

Mr. Dale Johnston: I concur with that, Mr. Chairman.

On any of this Elections Canada business, I wonder if it will be necessary to have Mr. Kingsley appear before us, or will we just be going over the reports?

The Chair: I'm not sure what you mean, Mr. Johnston.

Mr. Dale Johnston: On future business, we have three items that deal with Elections Canada.

The Chair: We could ask him to make a presentation on all three together when we deal with that.

Mr. Dale Johnston: We probably could not deal with that in one sitting.

The Chair: We'll see.

Given what everyone has said, if we've exhausted the debate, will someone move adjournment?

Madam Longfield moves adjournment and it is carried.

The committee is adjourned.

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