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Tuesday, June 5, 2007

—
Chair

Mr. Gary Goodyear

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC)): Colleagues, we're going to start our meeting this morning.

This morning's meeting will pretty much deal with two key issues. One is the steering committee's recommendations on where this committee should go over the next couple of weeks, and the second part will be based on whether we accept that report or not.

First, colleagues, let me tell you that we potentially have six meetings left. That's not a lot of time. The steering committee met this morning at eight o'clock and reviewed all the different motions before the committee, as well as leftover business, or some small items requiring more detailed discussions—which time potentially does not permit. As well, we looked at the list of potential legislation that could be sent before this committee.

The steering committee had lengthy and very in-depth discussions, and ultimately, here's what the steering committee decided.

We will deal this morning with Monsieur Guimond's motion in relation to questions by independent members during question period.

The second thing the committee recommended was that because all the other motions on your list require significant discussion, they should be put off until the fall.

The committee discussed Bill C-54 and a number of potential witnesses to be called on Thursday. We've narrowed the list down to four witnesses, all of whom will be contacted, if they've not already been contacted. Lucile has already sent out some e-mails this morning. The witnesses we requested will be here on Thursday, and those who can't make it on Thursday will be requested to submit a report by the end of day Friday, which will be translated and submitted to members late on Monday, if all goes well, for Tuesday's meeting. So we should finish our investigative process as a result of that action. We should be able, therefore, to begin clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-54 on Tuesday, June 12.

Again, rumours are flying about how much time we have left here in Parliament, but we may then begin with Bill C-55 on Thursday—but I think we're moving too far ahead. The steering committee only decided, therefore, on the plan of action for today's meeting, as I said, which will be to deal with Mr. Guimond's motion. If the committee agrees with that, we would ultimately adjourn today, and on Thursday we would come back to hear the witnesses.

I should also point out that the Conflict of Interest Code has been finished by our subcommittee after, I think, 11 meetings and some fairly arduous work. That is ready to be presented on Thursday. We'll have a look at that on Thursday as well, along with having our witnesses.

On Tuesday we'll begin clause-by-clause. We need to agree as a committee on a 24-hour notice for any amendments to Bill C-54, and we need to approve a budget.

So that's what we need to do today. Are there any discussions on that?

Madame Robillard, you're first, and Madame Redman, you're second.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): I have a question, Mr. Chairman.

My understanding is that if the witnesses slated to appear with regard to Bill C-54 are unable to come on Thursday, you will ask them to provide the committee with a brief by Friday if practicable.

Might we advise Mr. Mayrand, the Chief Electoral Officer, of the precise date and time of our meeting? The last time, we asked him for a more in-depth analysis of Bill C-54. We should therefore let him know that we would be expecting his document on Friday.

[English]

The Chair: We're supposed to have that by Friday of this week. It's already in the works, and we've been promised it by Friday. Of course, I'm assuming it will be in both official languages. As soon as we get it, it will be forwarded on.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Redman.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I appreciate the work of the steering committee, and just for record, we Liberals would be very happy to be here until the 22nd, if we need to, to get all of this done.

I want to clarify if you said in your report on the steering committee that we could potentially be doing Bill C-54 clause-by-clause and the Conflict of Interest Code on the same Thursday, or am I wrong?

The Chair: No.

Sorry, you did hear that wrong, or perhaps I said it wrong. This Thursday we would have the witnesses for Bill C-54, and the Conflict of Interest Code. Clearly, if there ends up being a lengthy discussion on this issue, we won't be able to deal with it on Thursday.

There has been such a lot of work done on that code.

Madame Redman, you were on that committee, so you know that there was a lot of work done.

Mr. Owen, you were on that committee, and a number of us were there. Chances are we'll have a look at that, and there may be brief discussions, and we'll be able to do it this Thursday.

Clause-by-clause on the contract—I can't see that starting until Tuesday, simply because I don't expect all the witnesses to be able to attend. One of them is a superior court judge. We're asking them.

For another witness—I believe, Madame Redman, recommended by you—we have only an e-mail address. There is no phone number. There is no way to contact them, and we're doing our very best.

I sense that some of them will ultimately be submitting reports rather than appearing in person. I can't see that happening before Monday, so I can't see us starting clause-by-clause before Tuesday, which means Thursday.... Anyway, that's all I have to say about that.

Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

My only question was that I understand we're going to deal with Mr. Guimond's motions today.

• (1110)

The Chair: As soon as this steering report is dealt with.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's great, and I'm aware of what the motions are. I'm familiar with them, but I don't have the exact wording. Do we have copies of them here?

The Chair: Yes. As soon as the team supports the steering committee's report, if that's where we're heading, we'll distribute the motion, and we'll distribute the budget, I suppose. Actually, no—that's just for me. I'm the only one that gets to see the budget.

Okay. Is everybody in favour of that?

Mr. Owen.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Just to make sure we're all anticipating the same thing, the four witnesses who are being contacted are who?

The Chair: The executive director of Equal Voice. The steering committee asked that the most...I guess the best word was the most ardent of the provincial folks, the toughest and most restrictive, come. That turns out to be Ontario. If Ontario can't come, the steering committee said we'll ask for the second toughest, so we're trying to get a face here, but it will be the chief electoral officer of one of the following provinces, beginning with Ontario. The Honourable Claire L'Heureux-Dubé, or the Right Honourable

Antonio Lamer—and Mr. Raymond Garneau, who I believe is a loans officer and....

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): He's a former bank executive.

The Chair: He's a former bank executive and a former member of Parliament, which sounds like a great choice. So those are our attempts.

Hon. Stephen Owen: Excellent.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Sorry, did you just say the Honourable Claire L'Heureux-Dubé, or the Right Honourable Antonio Lamer?

The Chair: Correct.

Mr. Scott Reid: They're very distinguished individuals. Would you mind sharing with us the rationale for summoning people of that calibre? I would be interested in hearing that.

The Chair: Mr. Proulx, if you would like, I will attempt, but these were—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: The question was in regards to the Honourable Claire L'Heureux-Dubé?

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, and Mr. Lamer. These are very distinguished people.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Yes, we would have one of the two. What we've discussed is that in regards to the protection of democracy, and to make sure the effect that restrictions of that sort could have on potential candidates in regards to the protection of democracy is well understood, they would be an excellent choice. The steering committee has agreed to have one or the other, or we'll have to see about other witnesses, or it could be both of them.

The Chair: Okay, folks, I think we're ready for the question. Does the committee accept the steering committee's recommendations?

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

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you want to adopt the budget first?

Lucile has put together a budget for us for the study of Bill C-54. It would include the cost of witnesses' expenses, potentially a video conference—that I don't see happening, but we have it here just in case—and miscellaneous. The budget is \$14,350 to study Bill C-54.

All in favour of the budget?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: My final request, colleagues, is that we support a 24-hour notice of amendments before clause-by-clause. Clause-by-clause is scheduled to begin at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, and all amendments would therefore need to be in by 11 a.m. on Monday. Is that acceptable? Those are standard procedures, but I just want confirmation. Is a 24-hour notice acceptable?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Colleagues, since we did adopt the steering committee's recommendation, we are now scheduled here to proceed with Mr. Guimond.

Mr. Guimond, everybody has the motion in front of them. Thank you.

Mr. Guimond, I'll offer you the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

I had a meeting this morning with the clerk and he suggested two changes for clarification. I don't know what the procedure is here and whether I must present an amendment.

On the wording of Standing Order 31.1(1), I would change it to:

Only once a week, pursuant to Standing Order 31, the Speaker may recognize

The independent member may not want to ask a question.

My colleague Mr. Proulx suggests another clarification, in accordance with the French version: the Speaker may recognize one of the independent members

The first one is for Standing Order 31, the declaration; the second one is for the question.

[*Translation*]

What is it, Lucienne?

• (1115)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: I want to know what change you are making to the present Standing Order.

Mr. Michel Guimond: My motion clarifies the situation, because at the present time, it is at the discretion of the Speaker. The Speaker has created precedents. An independent member can virtually never ask questions and virtually never be present, but an independent member who is always present will be able to ask more questions if he or she is a member of a caucus. This is why I have suggested this change, which was the object of a discussion. It was not a decision-making body, but when we had other problems to discuss with regard to the whips, my whip colleagues were made aware of the problem.

If members of a given political allegiance, who belong to one of the 21 or 26 parties recognized by Elections Canada... I will give you an example. Let us suppose that the Green Party sees its leader and two other members elected. The Standing Orders provide that the members of a party with fewer than 12 members are considered to be independents. Therefore, it is possible to be an independent member but to belong to a given banner. Here is Mr. Hill's concern. If, let us say, the two other independent colleagues of the leader of the Green Party allow him or her to put questions in their name, the leader is free to do so and would not fall under the one question or one statement per week limit.

This explains the second element, which I introduced at Mr. Hill's request:

For the purposes of Standing Order 31.1(1), members of political parties not officially recognized in the House are not considered independent members.

They would therefore have that right.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Colleagues, my apologies, I'd like to introduce our witnesses this morning. We have the Clerk of the House of Commons and the deputy clerk.

Madam, would you kindly introduce yourself and your guest this morning? Then we'll move to questions.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien (Clerk of the House): My name is Audrey O'Brien. I'm the Clerk of the House.

[*Translation*]

I am accompanied by Mr. Marc Bosc, deputy Clerk of the House of Commons. We are here to answer your questions, if you have any.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lukiwski, you're first, and then Madam Redman.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to make sure I understand in my own mind what Monsieur Guimond is proposing.

If I'm right, I think I agree with what you're saying. You're saying that currently—let's use exact terms—we have three independent members: Madame Thibault, Monsieur Comuzzi, and Monsieur Arthur. The way it's been working, if I understand it correctly, is that when you do the math and figure out the allocation, it allows for one question per independent per week. But since normally Monsieur Comuzzi and Monsieur Arthur have not been requesting questions, the Speaker has been allocating their questions to Madame Thibault. So she ends up sometimes getting three times as many questions as one would think.

What you're suggesting, then, is that the Standing Orders be changed so that under the current situation Madame Thibault or any member would only get one question every three weeks, right? You can't bundle the questions.

• (1120)

Mr. Michel Guimond: Not every three weeks, every week.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Every week, one question. Okay. Each of the three independents would get one question per week?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Each independent member is entitled to one question per week. That is what this says.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: No, not each independent member. That is not what it says.

Mr. Michel Guimond: It says: "Once a week, [...] may recognize an independent member [...]."

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: It only says "an"?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Yes. Once a week.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Thibault is entitled to a question once every three weeks.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard: No.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: No, that is not what we wanted to do.

[English]

The Chair: Order, please.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: If I may, Mr. Chair, this has been the subject of some discussion in the Speaker's office and with Monsieur Guimond. I think Mr. Lukiwski describes the situation accurately, that is to say for purposes of the Speaker's making a decision on how many people, how many times anyone gets recognized. He allots a certain number of questions to independents. And because two of the independents are not availing themselves of that, then one of them, Madame Thibault, ends up with a disproportionate amount.

As I understand it, what this would do is give directions to the Speaker on how to deal with independent members, and it would say that on any given week you get to give one question to one independent member.

An hon. member: So it could be to Madame Thibault every week.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: It could be to Madame Thibault, Monsieur Arthur, Mr. Comuzzi. It would be a question of the Speaker's deciding who had recently had a question. So every week there's one question from an independent and one statement from an independent.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'm trying to get what Monsieur Guimond was trying to achieve. I was correcting my assessment. There's one question per independent per week.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: No, there's one question for the independents in a week.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Right.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: So Madame Thibault, for example, would get one question in a week, not three.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Correct.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: She can come back during the course of the second week.

[English]

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Then in the next week she could again have another question, if the other two didn't come.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: As things now stand, if Ms. Thibault rises on Monday, on the Tuesday, if Mr. Arthur has not asked a question... I asked how many questions Mr. Arthur has put since April 6, 2006, in other words since we have been sitting here. He has not asked a single question. Mr. Comuzzi, however, is a model...

An honourable member: ... of discretion.

Mr. Michel Guimond: He is a model of discretion, so much so that I even told him, jokingly, that he was not the member for Thunder Bay, but the member for Tampa Bay.

Some honourable members: Oh, oh!

I do not want to insult my liberal colleagues. They will vote against my motion.

An honourable member: He is no longer liberal.

Mr. Michel Guimond: On Monday, Ms. Thibault rises. She asks a question. On Tuesday, if Mr. Comuzzi does not ask the Speaker permission to ask a question and if Mr. Arthur does not either, then the Speaker will once again recognize Ms. Thibault who will be wanting to ask a question.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: On the Tuesday?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Yes, on the Tuesday, the following day, within the context of the present system. This is what I wish to correct. I do not want to Ms. Thibault to have one question every three weeks. What I want is that, if she rises on the Monday, she be considered to have used the time allowed to the independents, because she will have put a question.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: For the week?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Yes, for the week.

The following week, if Mr. Arthur and Ms. Thibault rise to ask a question, perhaps the Speaker will tell Ms. Thibault that he is recognizing Mr. Arthur, because it would be his second question since April 6, 2006.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you. I'm aware of that. I'm good with that.

On the other hand, where we're saying that the members of political parties not officially recognized in the House would not be considered independent members, I believe what Monsieur Guimond is suggesting here.... Let's take the example of the Green Party and assume they elect some members to the next Parliament, but not more than 12. For the purposes of the House, they're not considered to be an official party because they have fewer than 12 members, but Monsieur Guimond is saying they should not be considered merely independents; they should still be considered to be a political party for the purposes of question period.

So would they get as many questions as the number of members they have? It might be one or two questions a day. I'm just trying to figure out what Monsieur Guimond is suggesting here.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: The example we have as a precedent for this was when the Bloc Québécois did not have membership and was not a recognized party in the House. At the time, the proportion of questions had already been allocated among the recognized parties. But the Speaker sorted it out by using the total number in the group that was unrecognized.

So I can't speculate on what the Speaker might do in the case of a Green Party with three members, for example. But as I read this draft, it suggests that if the Green Party had three members the Speaker would be free to use a formula for what the three members would get, even if meant the same member rising.

● (1125)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Right. The formula would be similar to the one they use for recognized parties.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That's right.

Mr. Michel Guimond: It would be part of the negotiations. At the beginning of a legislature we negotiate. You have 125 members on the government side, the Liberals have 102, we have 51, and the NDP has 29. We negotiate among us the number of spots for the 45-minute period. If there were three Green Party members, we would try to find—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's fine. I agree with what you're suggesting. I just wanted to make sure I understood what these changes would reflect.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I let a little bit of discussion go back and forth because I felt it was necessary, but let's try to keep it through the chair from now on.

Madam Redman, please.

Hon. Karen Redman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I have some of the same areas of lack of clarity.

Has anyone done the statistics on how many independent questions have been asked on a weekly basis up to this date in the current Parliament?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: I think on average there have been two, and more rarely three.

Hon. Karen Redman: Rather than projecting on something hypothetical, what happened when the Conservatives were down to two members? What was the rotation at that time?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Because of the nature of the situation, I'm a little reluctant to speculate as to what would happen just based on numbers. I think at the time there were discussions because the Conservative Party was one of the founding parties in the country, etc. That was more of a deciding factor than the formula. I don't believe that either Mr. Charest or Madam Wayne were treated as independents per se—if that helps.

Hon. Karen Redman: So if we were to adopt this, we would go from all or any independents in the House having the opportunity to ask two questions per week, down to only one a week. Whatever that rotation was or who those people were would be up to the Speaker, in his discretion with those independent members, who would all be treated as individuals, as opposed to any kind of collective.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That's right. It seems to me that the difficulty perceived with the way the Speaker is handling it now—and this is a precedent that he himself has been respecting—is that he's considering them as a collective of independents, if you will. That would not be possible under this proposed standing order.

Hon. Karen Redman: I guess we're recognizing this because the Library of Parliament document shows that we have had as many as 17 over time. So there could be the scenario where we're looking at 17 parliamentarians all vying for one spot—not just a handful of people.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That's right.

Hon. Karen Redman: Because this now specifically says it's once a week.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That's right.

Hon. Karen Redman: On Standing Order 31.1(2), I'll feed you back what I heard you explain to Mr. Lukiwski's question. That basically sets aside any recognized party, whether it's the Rhinoceros Party or whatever, as not being viewed as independent. So even if there were two or three of them, they would be dealt with as an entity.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That's right.

Hon. Karen Redman: That negotiation would happen in the normal way through the whips and House leaders.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Yes. I also suspect, from the way I read this, the Speaker would also be allowed to view them as a collective.

Hon. Karen Redman: So by having fewer than 12 members, a party would lack research moneys and any recognition it would get by reaching that threshold.

• (1130)

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: As I recall, the unrecognized parties that don't reach that threshold are not actually... Obviously there are discussions that go on with their colleagues from recognized parties, but I don't think they figure in the actual divvying up of the number of slots in question period in formal negotiations. Those formal negotiations, as I understand it, take place between the recognized parties, and this collective would still be under the wing of the Speaker.

Again, going back in history, we were talking about the two Conservatives, when Mr. Charest and Mrs. Wayne were sitting. The circumstances might be different and negotiations might want to take different things into consideration. Ordinarily it's the recognized parties that are part of the formal negotiations, and those outside that kind of fend for themselves.

Hon. Karen Redman: From experience, there are vigorous negotiations and debates that go on amongst recognized parties. I think that would be jealously guarded and be the purview of recognized parties.

This in no way affects anything other than their opportunity to ask questions in the House. They wouldn't get SO 31s.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: The SO 31 is dealt with by the second draft standing order.

Mr. Michel Guimond: It's the first one. The second one is the question.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Yes, SO 37 is the question.

Hon. Karen Redman: It would have no impact on their ability to participate in standing committees.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: That would be governed by the usual rules that exist. They're not usually members of standing committees, as you know, because that's again a purview jealously guarded by the recognized parties.

Hon. Karen Redman: Thank you.

The Chair: Monsieur Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I agree with the idea of changing the Standing Orders. When Mr. Guimond — and I think you will agree with me — brought up the issue of the independent members, it was not to remove from the Speaker the discretionary power of determining the number of independents who are entitled to rise in the House during the course of a week. One person cannot be allowed all of the questions decided upon by the Speaker. If the Speaker has decided to allow two questions from independent members during the course of a week and the member chooses to not put his or her question, the other person does not get to put the two questions. I simply wish to have the assurance that this is what we are discussing here.

What I am rather hearing is that there was one single question per week and if the member took the question this week and that the following week she took it again, then the other member would not be entitled to one. I do not agree with that. The Speaker allows more than one question per week to independent members.

In the previous government, there was the Bloc member, there were two independents, Ghislain Lebel and Madam Venne. If they each wished to rise and put a question during the week, they were entitled to do so. That is not the problem; the problem is rather when there are three or four independent members and only one person gets all of the questions allowed the independents. That is what Michel brought up.

I simply wish to know if that is what you think the Standing Orders say.

Mr. Michel Guimond: The Speaker is fair. During the course of the second week, he will have to balance things out. But, if on the Monday it is the same person who asks for a question and the other does not want to relinquish his question... The independent member might be in the House on the Tuesday, the Wednesday, the Thursday or the Friday. Ms. Thibault is using the ability the Standing Orders provide her.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, the problem was not...

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: The problem was not that she was asking a second question the following week, but that she was asking two questions in the same week. The following week was another week.

Mr. Michel Guimond: The same thing happened again the following week. She once again, the following week, asked two questions.

Mr. Yvon Godin: No...

[English]

The Chair: Order, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: All of this must be clear, Mr. Chairman. We are getting mixed messages.

[English]

The Chair: No, I agree. No, I'm going to allow you to do that, but I'd rather have it so the microphones are on so all members can participate in understanding what you're talking about. So perhaps you could address the chair, and if Monsieur Guimond wants to respond, I certainly am going to allow him that opportunity.

Right now it's to you, Monsieur Godin.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: If there are three or four independent members in the House, the Speaker has the discretionary authority to allow them to ask two questions each week. I do not want to take this privilege away from the Speaker, in the Standing Orders. It is then up to him to decide, among the independents, who will be allowed to ask the questions, but we are saying that any one member will not be able to ask two questions.

The Speaker could authorize Ms. Thibault to ask a question on the Monday, and again on the following Monday, if he so desires. That is not my concern: that is up to the Speaker to decide. However, the member would not be able to ask two questions during the same week. That is what the Standing Orders should establish. And I believe that we have agreed on that.

We are not going to start asking the Speaker if he has examined the list to see who came first and telling him that he can allow a member to ask a question on the Monday, but that given that the other member did not ask to be recognized, he or she will have to wait until the Thursday. Independent members have the right to ask two questions. But they will not have two questions in one and the same week. We have agreed on that.

● (1135)

[English]

The Chair: Okay, I think we have the point on that.

Do our witnesses want to respond to that? I know Monsieur Guimond has the answer for Mr. Godin, so if that's acceptable to everybody, Monsieur Guimond, please go ahead and respond.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: I have discussed this with the Speaker. He is taking things day by day. On the Monday, he looks to see which independent MP has put forward a question. He slates it in at the end of the Oral Question Period at 2:59 p.m. If it is the member who asked to put a question, he will grant him or her leave to do so. The following day, he goes through the same exercise. As a matter of fact, he repeats the exercise three times. When the other two members do not ask questions, then it is the same member who is allowed a question.

The Speaker told me that if we change the Standing Orders so as to give him a framework in order for him to be able to allow independent members to put one oral question and make one statement per week, then he would respect the Standing Orders, but he would retain his privilege to balance things out between independent members.

Therefore, if he has recognized Mr. Godin as an independent member during the week of September 17, then the following week, if Mr. Godin once again wishes to ask a question and another independent member also wishes to put a question, he would be free to tell Mr. Godin that, since he granted him the floor the previous week, he will this time recognize another independent member. But if the other member never asks to be allowed to put a question, then he will once again recognize Mr. Godin the second, third, and fourth week.

The Speaker wants to have a framework. According to what you are saying, Yvon, if there are 17 independent members, each one of them will want to be recognized. Perhaps you will in the end lose your opportunity to ask questions, as a fourth party. You should give serious thought to this matter.

Mr. Yvon Godin: At 2:59 p.m.

Mr. Michel Guimond: It will perhaps always be at 2:59 p.m., or perhaps at 2:58 p.m., for independent members wishing to put questions. That is not at all the spirit, when a second independent member wishes to rise one week to ask a question. If you have decided to not rise this week and another member who is there decides to rise, the following week, you will rise and you will put your question.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, colleagues—

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I had the floor. I wanted to know if, in the present system, at least two questions per week were granted to independent members, be there 17, 28, 2 or 3 of them. I believe that such is the case.

[English]

The Chair: Please.

[Translation]

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: Mr. Chairman, yes, independent members are entitled to ask more than one question per week. As I was saying earlier, this is based upon the Speaker's calculations in determining how many questions or statements, from a purely mathematical point of view, should be allowed independent members.

In his Standing Orders amendment proposal, Mr. Guimond is suggesting that there be one question only per week for the independent members. Mr. Godin is describing another system whereby the Speaker can recognize an independent member only once during the course of the week.

[English]

The Chair: Let me make sure everybody understands that Mr. Guimond has changed the wording of the motion—just so that everybody has it, Mr. Godin. We've changed it already, but we're recommending that this be only once a week.

Does everybody have a copy of this motion, with the wording down?

I want to read it, and then we're going to go to Mr. Owen: "Only once a week, pursuant to Standing Order 31, the Speaker may recognize an independent member." The second part there is: "For

the purposes of Standing Order 31.1(1), members of political parties not officially recognized in the House are not considered independent Members."

For the most part, the wording is identical with respect to questions in question period. For section 37(1.1)(a): "Only once a week, pursuant to Standing Order 37(1), the Speaker may recognize an independent Member." Again, the wording for proposed Standing Order 37(1.1)(b) is as you have it in front of you.

I just wanted to bring us up to date, because the discussion is carrying on.

I have Mr. Owen and I have Monsieur Guimond, but I appear to be recognizing you as need be, because this is your motion. Let's try to keep it to Mr. Owen, Monsieur Proulx, and then Madame Picard.

Mr. Owen, please.

• (1140)

Hon. Stephen Owen: Thank you.

First of all, let me apologize for not knowing the scope of the other standing orders, because they may clarify what is unclear to me at this point. Even with the changes to each of the motions, it's not clear to me, the way it's worded, whether it means each independent member only once a week may be recognized or that only one independent member per week may be recognized. That's the first question.

Second, I wouldn't want Standing Orders 31.1(2) and 37(1.1)(b) to be interpreted to mean that members of a political party, even though it wasn't officially recognized, would have even fewer rights than an independent to ask questions. I think I heard that the Speaker will work out some formula that's fair.

Does it say that anywhere? I think this is capable of being misconstrued to mean that you have fewer rights as a member of an unrecognized party than you have as an independent. It's really just a matter of interpretation.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: My understanding, Mr. Chairman, speaking through you, is that it is...I forget the phrasing Mr. Owen used in his first question, but basically it is one of however many independents.

An hon member: Only one?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: It's only one of however many independents.

Hon. Stephen Owen: Through you, Mr. Chair, are you saying that's the intention of this? I understand that to be the intention of it as well.

So my question is, is it capable of being misinterpreted when you read, "may recognize an independent"?

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: As I understood it, the first intervention of Monsieur Guimond, Mr. Chairman, was to say that per Mr. Proulx's excellent suggestion the wording be changed so that it reads, "one of the independent members"—

Hon. Stephen Owen: I missed that.

Ms. Audrey O'Brien: —rather than "an independent member", because that clarifies it. I think it makes it clearer.

With regard to the interpretation of the second section in this, Mr. Chairman, in the same way that the Standing Orders operate on a kind of common law basis, it's not said anywhere how the Speaker is to interpret these things. Every precedent we have would have us advising a Speaker that what this would mean is that you're not limited to the one. One would be your baseline, if you will.

Hon. Stephen Owen: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Owen.

Monsieur Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: No, I'm satisfied.

The Chair: I'm looking at Mr. Guimond again, but I think we're going to give Mr. Guimond the last word.

Madame Picard, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): I am fine, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: You're okay as well? How nice.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I would like to give you some information.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll let you, sure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Earlier, we were talking about political parties, including the Bloc Québécois. One must however remember that from 1993 to 1997, the NDP only had nine MPs. It was not recognized as an official party and its members were only entitled to two questions per week in the House of Commons. That was virtually a precedent.

[*English*]

The Chair: I don't think it's going to affect that situation, because it would be a recognized party.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: I simply wanted to underscore the fact that a precedent had been established.

• (1145)

[*English*]

The Chair: I think we're ready for the question on this motion. Are we ready for the question?

Colleagues, shall the Standing Orders be amended by adding the following, after Standing Order 31:

31.1(1) Only once a week, pursuant to Standing Order 31, the Speaker may recognize one of the independent Members.

(2) For the purposes of Standing Order 31.1(1), members of political parties not officially recognized in the House are not considered independent Members.

As well, the question is that the House of Commons Standing Orders be amended by adding the following after Standing Order 37 (1):

37(1.1)(a) Only once a week, pursuant to Standing Order 37(1), the Speaker may recognize one of the independent Members.

(b) For the purposes of paragraph (a) of this Standing Order, members of political parties not officially recognized in the House are not considered independent Members.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Colleagues, can I also have agreement that the clerk and the chair and researchers, etc., be authorized to make such grammatical and editorial changes as may be necessary, without changing the substance of the report?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Is it agreed that the chair present the report to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Michel Guimond: When will it be presented?

The Chair: It will probably be tomorrow. It might be today after QP, but I'm going to suggest to you tomorrow. That's something I can more likely keep as a promise, and we like to keep those.

Do I have that permission?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Colleagues, I think that ends our business for today. We will set up as best we can on Thursday, just so that you know and as a reminder.

I want to thank our witnesses for coming. It's always helpful having you here.

We will be having witnesses on Thursday to deal with Bill C-54. As well, there will be time, hopefully, to deal with the subcommittee's report on the Conflict of Interest Code.

Is there any further business?

Seeing none, the meeting is adjourned.

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