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Wednesday, November 14, 2007

—
Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

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•(1535)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Bélisle): Honourable members, I see a quorum. I am ready to proceed with electing a chair.

[English]

I'm ready to receive motions to that effect.

Madam Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): I nominate Yasmin Ratansi as the chair.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Moved by Ms. Maria Minna that Ms. Ratansi be elected chair of the committee.

[English]

Are there any other motions?

[Translation]

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Mrs. Ratansi is the duly elected chair of the committee.

Now, before inviting her to take the chair, if the committee wishes, we could proceed to the election of the vice-chairs. We might as well.

With the vice-chairs of this committee, the first vice-chair is somebody from the government side. Do I have any motions?

Madam Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): I'd like to nominate Patricia Davidson.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Moved by the Honourable Sylvie Boucher that Ms. Davidson be elected vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

Are there any other motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Madam Davidson, you're elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Now we're looking for a second vice-chair from the opposition, but from other than the official opposition. Do I have any motions?

Madam Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): I would like to nominate Ms. Irene Mathysen.

The Clerk: It is moved by Ms. Demers that Ms. Mathysen be elected second vice-chair.

[English]

Are there any other motions to that effect?

[Translation]

As there is no other motion, Ms. Mathysen is elected second vice-chair of the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I invite Ms. Ratansi to take the chair.

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Welcome, committee members, and congratulations to the vice-chairs. I hope we have a very fruitful year.

The clerk advises me that there's been a distribution of routine motions. Perhaps we can take a look at those motions and go through them. If it is the wish of the committee, we can do it now. Is it the wish of the committee that we can proceed with the routine motions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

•(1540)

The Chair: What I'm going to do is ask that for anybody who wants to speak on the first motion, services of analysts from the Library of Parliament—if we have nothing to say and we say we agree, please say “agree” so we can move on with it.

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

The Clerk: Perhaps we could now invite our analysts to come and sit.

The Chair: The analysts are here if we run into any trouble or we need any clarification.

On the next item, the subcommittee on agenda and procedure, are we okay with it or do we have some comments or concerns? Reduced quorum? No or yes?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have a motion regarding the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure.

[English]

The Chair: That's why I asked.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I move:

That the Sub-Committee on Agenda and Procedure be composed of the Chair, the two Vice-Chairs, the Parliamentary Secretary, a second member for the Liberal party and a member from the other opposition party. Quorum of the Subcommittee shall consist of at least three (3) members one of whom must be from the government. Each member of the sub-committee shall be permitted to have one assistant attend at any meetings of the Sub-Committee on Agenda and Procedure.

[English]

The Chair: Do you have copies to be distributed to people? We cannot make any decision if we don't have anything in front of us. Are they translated in both official languages?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes.

The Chair: You haven't given copies to everyone. You've just given us copies, correct?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We'd like to look at that after the next week.

• (1545)

The Chair: What we are going to be doing is this. There's a suggestion by the clerk that we remove the subcommittee on agenda and procedure, because as a committee we've always brought things over to this committee anyway. We do not have subcommittees. While the person has gone to do photocopying so that people can have what you're saying in front of them, let us think about whether we really want a subcommittee. We've never used it and we have always come to the committee. Everything has been discussed at the committee level. No decisions have been made by a subcommittee. We have never used a subcommittee. So we could eliminate the subcommittee anyway.

Mr. Stanton, and then Ms. Davidson.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate that in the past we have not used the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. I do recall, however, that these are the same routine motions as we had in the previous session. That option is still there should the committee wish to utilize it. One can never tell if you might get into circumstances where it might be needed, and if one did need to use it, then at least the procedures and protocol for that committee would be set out.

It's up to the committee to decide how it wishes to proceed in these matters, but at the very least the committee will have those motions in place—those tools, if you will—if they should need to use them. I think just because we haven't used them doesn't mean we might not need to at some point in the future.

The Chair: Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I was going to say much the same as Mr. Stanton did. I think our committee worked fairly well last time without enacting the subcommittee. I do sit on another committee and it was working quite well, but it got to the point where we had to use the subcommittee. It was good that it was laid out in the routine motions and it was there when we needed it. When we don't need it, we certainly don't even need to worry about it. I think it's well worth our while to have something in there.

The Chair: Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Madam Chair, I understand what's being said. However, although it hasn't always succeeded, most of the time this committee has tried to work on consensus, because of the nature of the work that we do, and we have not ever used a subcommittee. We agreed the last time that we would not use a subcommittee. I'm not quite sure what the point of it would be. As soon as you put something there, then you start using it and then you start moving away from what I would consider a consensus approach to this committee. I think this committee works best when it works around the table. We've made some really good decisions. I would hate for us to move away from that. I quite frankly don't support leaving it in. I think we should leave the issue of the subcommittee out altogether, as we did in the past.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to support Ms. Minna and indicate that I too prefer to have issues come before the entire committee.

I also wanted to point out, in reference to the motion from the Conservative Party, that in 1985 the McGrath committee recommended that PAs be removed from steering committees and from committee. The whole idea was that committees have to be independent. This motion runs counter to the idea and ideal of the independence of committees, so I would not be happy with it.

The Chair: Madam Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I also agree with Ms. Minna. In the past, we have always tried to adopt a non-partisan approach. This was always helpful, even if we do not always share the same ideas or objectives. When we deal with issues that concern 52% of the population, it is very good if we can agree, at least in this place, about what we must discuss and how we go about it. So far, there has never been a problem. We have always agreed about the issues we want to debate, the witnesses we want to hear and the procedure we want to follow. So far, we have never noticed a problem. Therefore, I do not see why we should have such a committee, if we want to be efficient. That committee will simply decrease our efficiency.

[English]

The Chair: Does anybody else want to comment?

Do I hear a consensus to remove the subcommittee on agenda and procedure—or not to create it at all? We never had it. So that's done.

The next one I have is on reduced quorum. You have it in front of you.

Are we agreed?

Yes, Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Excuse me, Madam Chair, but I think the other sheet of things that Mr. Stanton gave you, which is being copied, addresses these things. Perhaps people should wait until they have it.

• (1550)

The Chair: So you have an amendment to the reduced quorum as well.

Oui.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, with your permission, while we are waiting for the documents, I would like to introduce the colleague who will be coming with me to the committee, Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac. She will be sitting on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Joanne, my other colleague, will be sitting on the Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I will be pleased to work with Ève-Mary, just as all of you will.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you. Welcome.

Ms. Nicole Demers: I would also like to tell you, Madam Chair, that Ms. Margot, who is our assistant today, became a grandmother yesterday. Her son had a beautiful baby, a girl weighing nine pounds and three ounces. She is big.

Some hon. members: Congratulations.

[*English*]

The Chair: Committee members, I have a suggestion from the clerk. Because we see that there are amendments to just about everything in the routine motions, is it possible to take them and read them so that we can have an intelligent discussion at the next meeting?

Hon. Maria Minna: It would be when, Madam Chair? Will it be Monday at 3:30?

The Chair: Yes.

And if you could send an electronic version, the members who are missing will receive it.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Is it agreed?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes. I think it's a good idea for all of us.

The Chair: So that you don't think you're ready to adjourn, can we discuss what we would like to do in the future as a committee?

The Clerk: Our researcher has prepared what could be discussed in the future, but this has not been distributed to members yet. We could send it electronically and you could discuss it after that on Monday, because they don't have it.

The Chair: Okay.

What I would like to do is get the researchers to speak for a few minutes, because they can tell you that this is nothing new. We had discussed in June what we wanted to do going forward, and perhaps they can give us a little brief on what it was that we discussed. Sometimes we forget what we have discussed in June. Perhaps they can send us something electronically and we can then put the meat on the bones at the next meeting. Okay?

Why don't I give the researchers a few minutes to speak.

Go ahead.

Ms. Clara Morgan (Committee Researcher): In June 2007 the members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women suggested possible areas for future study. I present these in a short document entitled, "Suggested Studies for Future Business". I also added in routine activities such as supplementary estimates, government responses, and the departmental performance report. The clerk will distribute this tomorrow.

The Chair: Okay. You will get it electronically.

Is there any other business?

Oui, Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, I have a motion, but I do not know where to introduce it. I intend to table a motion requiring that we, the members around this table, no longer be allowed to use our BlackBerries while we are questioning witnesses. It is all right for our assistants to use them, but not for us. We must be respectful toward the witnesses.

Those who want to use them can go somewhere else. Last year, while we were questioning witnesses, a few unfortunate incidents occurred. People told us afterwards that they had felt uneasy because they did not think that they were being listened to. I do not want that to happen again.

I do not know how to table this motion or when to table it. Should I table it in connection with the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure?

• (1555)

[*English*]

The Chair: I think it could be a general motion and you can word it and send to the clerk, and then we can discuss it. We have discussed in the past that we have to be respectful towards people who come. In the spirit of being respectful, we can discuss that motion, I'm sure, when it comes to us. Fair enough?

Is there any other business?

Monday is going to be a busy day.

This meeting is adjourned.

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