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**Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills
and Social Development and the Status of
Persons with Disabilities**

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Thursday, February 5, 2009

—
Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(1115)

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Holke David): Honourable members of the committee, I see there is a quorum.

[*English*]

Welcome to the committee. My name is Christine Holke David. I am the clerk of the committee. I am accompanied today by my colleague Michelle Tittley, who is also a clerk.

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. I am ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): I so move Dean Allison.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Cannan that Mr. Allison be elected as chair of the committee.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): I'd be honoured and delighted to second the nomination of Dean Allison to be our very adequate chair.

The Clerk: Are there any further motions?

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Before inviting Mr. Allison to take the chair, we will proceed to the election of vice-chairs.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

I am ready to receive motions for the positions of first vice-chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Savage: It is my pleasure and honour to nominate Madame Raymonde Folco as first vice-chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Savage that Madame Folco be elected as first vice-chair of the committee.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): I'd like to second that motion.

The Clerk: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Are there any other motions? Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Ms. Folco duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

I am now prepared to receive motions for second vice-chair.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): I am pleased to nominate Yves Lessard.

The Clerk: It is moved by Mrs. Beaudin that Mr. Lessard be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any other motions?

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin: I would like to second that motion.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Monsieur Lessard duly elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

I now invite Mr. Allison to take the chair.

•(1120)

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): We're going to make sure that everyone has the list of routine motions we adopted from the previous Parliament, as well as a standard list of routine motions, so we can make sure we're working off the same sheet.

I would like to welcome everyone to the human resources committee. I know that this committee has worked fairly well in the past, and certainly during the 39th Parliament. I'm looking forward to working with everyone as we move forward.

You have before you two lists of routine motions. Right now I will focus on the list that was passed by the 39th Parliament so individuals are not confused by two different lists. We'll move forward. They're numbered 1 through 14. If there's anything we feel is missing, by all means we can look at that.

In previous committees in which I was involved, this has taken from two to three hours. Maybe we can make it happen a little quicker today, but I won't make any promises. If we can do that, it would be great.

The first motion I have states that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be composed of the chair, the two vice-chairs and one member of the New Democratic Party.

It is a motion we worked with before on the subcommittee on agenda. Do we have anyone to move that motion?

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): I was on the immigration committee prior to being on the HUMA committee, and we started out along these lines. Our group and I suggested that the PS also be placed on the subcommittee's agenda. It seemed to work well and was helpful, in the sense that when it came back to the main body we didn't rehash a lot of the stuff, because we had indicated what the minister would like, what our group would like, and so on. It seemed to work well. Many committees don't have parliamentary secretaries—some do—but in immigration it worked. I would ask this group to consider it, and if you feel otherwise that's fine too.

The other thing I want to raise is that I'm not sure how it has worked in the past, but having each member of the opposition and no government member puts the chair in an awkward spot because he is the chair. I would say it should be a PS or one member of the present party. So I move an amendment that the parliamentary secretary be one of the parties added, or another government member. That's the only change I would make.

The Chair: I want someone to first make the motion. I apologize.

Mr. Savage is going to move the motion.

We'll go back to you, Mr. Komarnicki, if you would like to make it an amendment that the PS be added—

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Or a government member.

The Chair: Okay. I just came from the international trade committee, and it was recommended there by the NDP that a government member also be on the subcommittee on agenda. That is your proposed amendment. That's what we're discussing on the floor.

We'll take a list. I have Mr. Savage next, followed by Madame Folco.

•(1125)

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me offer my congratulations on your reappointment as chair. For you to do it on a voluntary basis is really very noble. Thank you for that.

I will oppose the amendment. This committee always worked before, when I was on the subcommittee, with a member from the

Liberal Party, a member from the Bloc, Mr. Martin, and you as chair. It's not as if committee chairs aren't part of the governing party. They go to caucus meetings and have as much input as anybody else. I think you've always represented your party very well at those meetings, so I don't think there needs to be an extra member of this committee on the subcommittee.

The Chair: We'll go down the list right now. I have Madame Folco and then Mr. Vellacott.

Madame Folco.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I too would like to congratulate you on your election. We have not worked together in the past, but I have heard a lot of very good things about you.

I am opposed to Mr. Komarnicki's motion. His argument has to do with the importance of having the parliamentary secretary present, because he has access to some information that could be useful to the steering committee. I found that interesting in some respects. However, he added that this individual could also be another government representative, not the parliamentary secretary. I do not find this logical at all. All he is really calling for is to have another government member on the steering committee.

I am therefore opposed to this motion, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, I've got Mr. Vellacott, Ms. Minna, Mr. Martin, and then Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): I have a question, I guess, in terms of seeking some clarification of the voting status if you were then to have an additional person from the Conservative Party, be it the parliamentary secretary or otherwise.

I don't know if I need to propose this or if that was inherent in the motion that was put forward before, but there may be a consideration of the chair then not having any vote so as to keep him neutral and out of the fray, so to speak, but only the other—be it the parliamentary secretary or the other person—having a vote. I don't know if that's a consideration by the other members there too, if the concern is about issues of votes.

I am supportive of it because I've seen in the past how it can work. I've served on these particular subcommittees like this, and you want the chair to be able to be neutral and remain neutral, if you will. I think it protects our chair, Mr. Allison, to kind of stay out of the back and forth so much and just moderate the discussion. I think it actually has the merit of doing that, so I would encourage that.

But I guess I should get clarification from Mr. Komarnicki in terms of the voting status of this other proposed either parliamentary secretary or person on the committee, whether they have a vote or not, and that may do something to relieve any concerns or worries of members opposite.

Would that be appropriate to ask at this point?

The Chair: Sure. The way a subcommittee works, once again, is that usually a consensus is brought forward. It has to be voted on again by, as you're aware, the committee as a whole. So regardless, if I didn't agree with them, it came back anyway to be discussed by them.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: And so you would then only have a tie-breaker vote? Is that your inference?

The Chair: No, everything came back, and even if it was unanimous, we still had to bring it back to the main committee for agreement.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I know, exactly, and that sometimes is the frustration of these committees. For those on the committee, it's sometimes a waste of time because you rehash all the same stuff again at the main committee. So how often you even meet then becomes a bit of an issue, whether you want to waste people's time, if it's kind of testy in those situations.

I don't know if Mr. Komarnicki has a response on that.

The Chair: What I'll do is put him on the list. If you want to respond, I'll put you on the list.

Once again, since we're still on the amendment, I've now got Ms. Minna, Mr. Martin, Mr. Lessard, and Mr. Komarnicki.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think we're making far too much of this, for starters. It seems to me that the chair obviously is also a member of the government and would have been briefed, presumably, and would be privy to information. I doubt very much that the chair does not know what's going on within the gamut of his own government.

• (1130)

The Chair: You'd be surprised.

Hon. Maria Minna: Well yes, but just the same, I think—

An hon. member: Come on over to us.

Hon. Maria Minna: Given that the committee is meant to be small and to have a consensus, there is no worrying about votes and what have you. The standing committee is a committee of Parliament, not an arm of the government; therefore I think having the parliamentary secretary on such a small committee that is trying to just set an agenda isn't going to be necessary.

Obviously the agenda is brought to this body in any case and is then discussed. Then of course with respect to whichever agenda we adopt and work that we do, obviously the parliamentary secretary is present at all times, so I really don't see the need for this at all. I think we're wasting a great deal of time trying to do this, given the work we have at hand. I suggest we move on.

The Chair: I'm starting to get a consensus of where we're going. I do have on the list Mr. Martin, Mr. Lessard, and Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: I don't want to repeat what's already been said, but I certainly agree with Ms. Minna, who has suggested that committees are a creature of Parliament and not of the government and, as such, need to be cognizant of maintaining that independence, and for there to be undue influence from a parliamentary secretary speaking on behalf of the minister might not be in the best interests

of that. I would also like to say that my experience of the last Parliament was that the subcommittee as it was structured worked really well. We did work on a consensus basis, and as the chair has said, ultimately we brought it back to the larger committee anyway.

I think the measure of a subcommittee is how effective it is in getting what it brings back passed by the larger committee, and in most instances that happened. We didn't get into a big wrangle when we came back. It didn't start all over again. Not all the time, but most of the time when we came back with a recommendation, it was accepted because it was logical and well thought out and made sense, and it certainly was not a waste of time.

So I would suggest that we retain that model, and if there's a consensus being built here, I certainly want to be a part of it.

The Chair: All right. I have just two people left.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): You know me, Mr. Chair, and I never want to complicate things that are not complicated. I do not think that this is such a complicated committee.

Mr. Vellacott's comments suggest that the fact that we have no power is a serious matter. It is not, because the subcommittee's role is to do the preliminary work before sending issues back to the main committee.

Mention was also made of the possibility of informing us. Mr. Chair, if your party did not see fit to pass information on to you, I doubt it would pass it on to us. That would merely complicate matters.

We must also remember how we work. You explained it very well a little earlier, Mr. Chair. You also have the right to speak and the right to vote. We function without a great deal of rigidity. I have been a member of this committee for four years now. I believe you were there when I started as well, Mr. Chair. In any case, we have been on this committee for some time now. The fact that we have no representative from the House has never caused a problem.

Consequently, I disagree with this amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll take one last comment by the presenter of the amendment, and we'll have a vote on it.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: There's no question the chair is fully capable and confident and represents us at the committee. There may be a small loss in not having the PS there, but it has worked in the past. I appreciate the comments, and I guess we should just put it to a vote and move on.

The Chair: I'm going to call the question on the amendment as proposed by Mr. Komarnicki.

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: All right, now we're going back to the main motion.

There's no more discussion. I'll call the question on the main motion as it was originally read out.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1135)

The Chair: Let's move to the second motion. I'm going to need someone to move 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. Who's going to move that motion?

Mr. Lessard, thank you very much.

Is there any discussion on this? Yes, you guys realize we need their help. That is correct.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We can now welcome you back to the table out of exile there on the side.

We're now going to move to the third motion, which is that the chair or the vice-chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive and publish evidence when a quorum is present, provided that one member of the opposition is present.

Could I have someone to move that before we have some discussion?

Thank you, Ms. Minna.

Is there any discussion on this? Mr. Cannan, did you have your hand up?

Mr. Ron Cannan: I wanted a clarification, and I might propose an amendment.

My understanding is that if no government representative is there—because it could be the vice-chair who has the meeting—it could be all opposition without government there. So I'd like to make a friendly amendment that one member of the opposition as well as the government is present.

The Chair: Now we're going to speak to the amendment. What is amended is that he just added “that one member of the opposition is present, as well as one member of the government”.

(Amendment negatived)

The Chair: We're going to go back to the original routine motion number three. Is there any more discussion on number three? No, so I will call the question on number three as moved by Ms. Minna.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We're going to move to number four, and I want to remind the committee that number four was based on the 39th Parliament. There has been a change in the number of seats. I know there probably has been some discussion. I believe a proposal of speaking orders has been handed out.

I want to address the speaking order that has been proposed. I'm going to read the motion first as I look at number four: “that in hearing evidence, the witnesses be allowed a maximum of ten (10) minutes for their presentation and that the rounds of questioning be as follows”. Now I'm going to refer to what has been proposed and handed out, that the first round look at Liberal, Bloc, NDP, and Conservative for seven minutes each; the second round look at Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative,

NDP, and Conservative for five minutes. I want people to have a chance to think about that for a second.

Why don't you move that motion and then comment on it? Mr. Komarnicki is going to move that motion and then he is going to speak to that.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I move the motion as presented.

I've had some discussion with Mr. Savage, Mr. Lessard, and Mr. Martin. Essentially what the motion attempts to do is give everyone an opportunity to speak, but it ensures that the NDP gets a second-round spot to speak, and it is finished off by a Conservative if there is time.

Is that your understanding, Mr. Martin?

Mr. Tony Martin: We're in there, but I'm going to have some comments to make after you.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Okay. And my sense is that this motion should read that notwithstanding all of this, the NDP should get to speak on the second round.

The Chair: Now we're going to take a list of names to talk about this motion moved by Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Martin, did you want to chat about it?

Mr. Tony Martin: I'm certainly happier with this than I was with the one circulated yesterday.

Just to give a little historical background, for those who haven't been here before, we've been consistently losing ground at this committee. Two Parliaments ago, each party had equal opportunity in both rounds. Then we got to a third round, when the size of the caucuses kicked in.

If you look at the history of committees over the history of Parliament, in committees we don't work so much on the number of members around the table; we make sure that each party gets equal opportunity to ask questions and participate.

The last time around we were dropped down, so we actually came in behind the Liberals on the second round. I'm sorry, we came in early in the round. Last time we were sixth; this time we're seventh.

I just want to say, Mr. Chair, that it was your fairness that made it work last time. You made sure, in managing the time of the committee, that we actually got to the NDP in the second round, and we did, and I was satisfied with that. We're now seventh on the list in the second round.

I guess I'm just making a point. I'm going to be okay with this as long as I can be assured by you that you will continue to operate in the same fashion and that there will be effort made—I notice that a Conservative member is going to get a spot after us in that second round—to ensure that we all get our fair shot at asking a question and that we are included in the second round. It didn't make any sense at all to me, in the list that was circulated yesterday, that we would be dropped completely from the second round, that we would get in on just this first round and then sit and watch for the rest of the proceedings. It didn't make any sense to me.

As long as you continue to operate in as fair a fashion as you have been, that will be acceptable to me.

●(1140)

The Chair: Okay. Thanks, Tony.

I just want to point out that even with this list, there's still one Conservative who does not have a chance to speak. There are actually five Conservatives. Oh, do you have all five here? So what happens, Tony, is that you get a chance to speak before all members get a chance to speak. We want to continue to work to make sure that all members show up and do the work, that everyone gets a chance. And then, at my discretion, as we did before, if we have more time and more people want to ask questions, by all means, we'll start to recognize you.

I have Mr. Cannan, Mr. Savage, and Madame Folco.

Go ahead, Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan: You articulated my perspective very well, thank you.

The Chair: Thanks.

We'll have Mr. Savage.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Well, actually, I was just going to say that we just came from the international trade committee, and we passed a similar motion saying that everybody gets to speak once before the NDP gets to speak a second time. I think we're being more generous in this committee than in the previous one.

The Chair: Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: I want to thank Mr. Komarnicki for initiating a discussion on this so that we can figure it out.

This committee has worked well in the past. I think we have to recognize that there is an extra member of the Conservative Party on the committee and that the person should have a chance to speak. We want to be flexible. I know that you, as chair, on occasion will say that we only have so much time and will ask if we can go down to three-minute rounds, or whatever it is. That has to work. If the committee is going to work as it has in the past—and it's worked quite well in the past—then we all have to make it work for each other as well as for ourselves. Ultimately we all do better. So this makes sense.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Madame Folco.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to congratulate the party opposite, particularly the parliamentary secretary. The document we have before us at the moment, including the list for the second round, contains better ideas than those put forward yesterday, because the NDP representative is on the second round. It is important that this be so.

I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his flexibility and understanding. It is important that the NDP member be on both rounds. After all, he is an elected member of Parliament.

I will not repeat what my colleague Mr. Savage said. However, you have one additional member, so it makes sense that you would have one additional turn. Next time, we will see these things differently.

●(1145)

[*English*]

The Chair: I know, disappointing as that may seem at times.

I think having a chance to talk before committees works well. When anyone drops things on people at the committee level, it's very hard even to have some discussions with our own members. So thank you for that.

If there's no more discussion, I'm going to call the question on Mr. Komarnicki's motion as read.

(Motion agreed to.)

The Chair: Thank you.

Let's move to motion five on the list.

What has been suggested is that we combine motion five and motion 12 to read as one motion, so I will read it out here.

Motion five states: "That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two (2) representatives per organization", and I am going to add: "and that, if requested, reasonable child care expenses of witnesses be reimbursed."

Once again, for our new members, the reason that has been suggested in the past is that we are a committee that deals with child care, amongst other things, and certainly we would want to make sure that people were not held back as a result of not being able to do that.

Mr. Lessard, you're going to make that motion? It is so moved. Thank you very much, sir.

Is there any discussion on that motion? All right, I'll just call the question on that motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move to motion six now, which is 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.

I'll have Madame Folco make that motion.

Is there any discussion on that? Madame Folco.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Just a point of information. In the past, on all the committees of which I have been a member, the chair has always agreed to motion number 6. However, in the past, certain individuals—not committee members—have sometimes tried to distribute documents in one official language only, without going through the chair.

I am not asking for a motion on this; I would simply ask that committee members acknowledge that no documents may be distributed without the chair's authorization. That is what motion 6 states.

[English]

The Chair: Are there any other comments on motion six? Then I'll call the question on motion six.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll move to motion seven: that the committee authorize the chair, in consultation with the clerk, to make the necessary arrangements to provide for working meals, from time to time, and that the cost of these meals be charged to the committee's budget.

I guess that may be a little more relevant given the fact that we're meeting between 11 o'clock and 1 o'clock at this point in time.

Did you want to comment on that Mr. Lessard?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Yes, I will move the motion, Mr. Chairman. In fact, we had a debate on that very subject when Ms. Folco was the chair.

Our committee starts at 11 o'clock. Our debates sometimes go beyond 1 o'clock. Even when we don't go beyond 1 o'clock, we are often forced to run to a caucus or to prepare for question period, and as a result we do not have time to eat. That creates a problem. When I don't have time to eat lunch, that raises health concerns for me. That is why I am moving it.

[English]

The Chair: It is moved by Mr. Lessard.

Thank you, Mr. Lessard. I doubt we'll get any disagreement here, but let's call the vote.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll move to motion eight: that, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to have one staff person at in camera meetings. In addition, each party shall be permitted to have one party staff member at in camera meetings.

Can I have someone to move that? It is moved by Mr. Savage. Thank you very much.

Is there any discussion on this? Once again, this is fairly routine. I'm going to call the question on motion eight as proposed.

Do we have some discussion still?

• (1150)

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, just hold on one second.

Once again, to give clarification, this was to allow parties to have someone from the whip's office there, just so they are in touch with what's going on. I believe this has worked well in the past.

If there's no more discussion, I'll call the question.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Let's move to motion nine, which is that unless there is unanimous consent, two days' written notice must be given before any new item of business be considered by the committee.

Once again, 48 hours has been standard at all committees.

Okay, can I have someone make that motion? Mr. Savage so moves.

Now we have an amendment by Mr. Komarnicki. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I've just had a document distributed. It's not in both official languages, so we need it to be corrected there.

The reason I put it in is that it was one that we had in the immigration committee, and it worked well. It doesn't substantively change the two days' notice, but what it does say is that it's a 48-hour notice that is calculated from the time the clerk of the committee sends it out. I put in brackets "not counting weekends", and I don't know whether we should worry about that or not. But the intent of the motion is that you have to have 48 hours' notice. The notice starts to run from the time the clerk sends it out, and you don't count Saturday and Sunday. You get a clear 48 hours' notice and you know when it starts. This seemed to work well in the immigration committee.

I'll read it:

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 and that the period of notice be calculated from the time the motion has been distributed to the members of the committee by the clerk of the committee (not counting weekends).

It think it means that without saying it, which is why I put in in.

The Chair: Do we have any other discussion on this?

We'll go with Madam Folco, and then Mr. Savage.

[Translation]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: First of all, I am sorry, Mr. Komarnicki, but I must point out the fact that you have presented a motion in English only and that you were given time to do it. I will accept it because we are just getting started, but I must say that I am addressing this intentionally because you know the rules.

In addition, I don't fully understand—and I would like someone to explain this to me—how 48 hours is considered an improvement over two days. We could say two working days, for example. I don't understand the difference between the two.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: It's not calling into question the two days or 48 hours—I think they're the same thing. The issue was to provide clarity as to when the notice starts. If you wish to have "two days" as opposed to "48 hours", it's no big deal. I used 48 hours to signify two days. I have no problem if you want to call them days as opposed to hours.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: So why is it substantive?

The Chair: Where he was suggesting it was different is that it be from the time the members get to see it versus from the time the clerk receives it.

That is the substantial difference there, correct?

I'm taking a list here. Madam Folco, are you done?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I do have another question.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll speak in English because the motion is in English.

At the first line it says "48 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion". My first question is, who decides when a motion is substantive, and what is a substantive motion as opposed to a "regular" motion?

Unless we have a good answer to that, I would suggest, as a friendly amendment or any other kind of amendment, that the word "substantive" be removed from that motion.

The Chair: I've just been informed by the clerk that "substantive" means that it's a debatable motion. So we're assuming that any motion that comes forward would be debatable.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Let's take the word out.

The Chair: We could take the word out. Are you okay with the word out?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: If there is agreement with that.

The Chair: Okay, so we'll just remove the word.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Everywhere it appears in the motion.

An hon. member: What did we just take out?

• (1155)

The Chair: The word "substantive" has been removed.

I'm still taking names. Madam Folco, did you have any additional comments?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: It's all right.

The Chair: We can come back to you, Madam Folco, if you'd like.

We're going to go with Mr. Savage, Mr. Lessard, Ms. Minna, and then Mr. Martin.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: I don't want to be obstreperous on this motion, but I don't see why we need to make a lot of changes. I don't think we had a lot of issues before about the two days' notice. It seems reasonably simple to me. I'll listen to other arguments that people have on that, and if there is the sense that we need to be more specific, I would support that. I'm just not sure we need it.

The Chair: Thank you. Let's continue on. I'm going to put you on the list.

Mr. Lessard, followed by Ms. Minna, Mr. Martin, and then back to Mr. Komarnicki.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, I am not being capricious. I can get by somewhat in Spanish, but unfortunately, not in English. What I have in front of me does not enable me to participate in the debate. Therefore, I would ask you to rule this amendment out of order, unless I receive an immediate translation. I am prepared to write it down if someone can give me a proper translation. I will write it very

slowly to get the content. Otherwise, I would ask you to rule this amendment out of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: For the sake of Mr. Lessard—and you've got a legitimate point—we'll make sure that going forward, motions are written in both official languages.

But I'm going to ask—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I am still not getting the French translation, Mr. Chairman.

[*English*]

The Chair: Sure.

I'm going to ask that in the future we have translated copies of the motions. But for the time being, I'm going to ask Mr. Komarnicki to read the motion slowly into the record so we can determine what he is talking about.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I thank Mr. Lessard for his indulgence, and I certainly take what he and Madame Folco say to heart. I give my assurance that in the future we will do that in advance.

I will read the motion:

That 48 hours' notice be required for any motion to be considered by the Committee, unless the 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 and that the period of notice be calculated from the time the motion has been distributed to the members of the committee by the Clerk of the Committee (not counting weekends).

The Chair: Once again, I believe what is different in this motion from the original number nine is that the start of the time period will be when members receive the motion versus the clerk of the committee.

That's really what we're debating here, correct, Mr. Komarnicki?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: It's the essence.

The Chair: So let's keep that in mind as we move forward.

I'm going to continue with the list, and we can add people. I've got Ms. Minna, Mr. Martin, and Mr. Komarnicki.

Let's go with Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: I'm okay.

The Chair: You're okay? Thank you.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Tony Martin: Yes, I just want to know from Mr. Komarnicki what problem he's trying to solve with this motion. I mean, you keep referencing how this worked at some other committee. We didn't have a problem at this committee with it. I don't remember there being any kind of a kerfuffle over the timing of when a motion was put in or sent out or whatever. We all knew it took two days. It was 48 hours from when we submitted it, and we expected it would come up at the next committee meeting. So I don't know what problem we're trying to solve with this amendment and why we would do that when we haven't had any difficulties on this issue.

We may be anticipating difficulties, but we've been able to resolve those on this committee. We've had our differences and our very intense and heated debates over various things, but at the end of the day we have worked them out.

Maybe Mr. Komarnicki is bringing forward problems of other committees that really didn't happen at this committee. I think that would be unfortunate. I think we have a unique and very positive history here. We have a culture of working together. I don't think we want to be solving the problems of other committees by moving amendments that really aren't necessary.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thanks.

I have Mr. Komarnicki and Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Just to clarify, it's not to cause any problems or to resolve a problem that exists today, but many times it's wise to set the rules so when a problem arises you're not debating the issue then. It makes good sense, because what's important in the 48 hours' notice, or the two days' notice, is the fact that you have that time from the time you get it. If it comes to the clerk late in the day or something and doesn't get out necessarily to the members, you don't have the fullness of that notice.

All this says is that I can be assured when I give a motion that Mr. Savage will have it in exactly two days and everybody else on the committee will have it in two days, because it's from the time he gets it as opposed to the time it gets sent to the clerk. Nothing against the clerk, but it just puts that level of certainty on it and it removes any doubt, and you know when you've got notice you need to deal with it. That's all it's meant to do. It's something you do in advance so that nobody argues about it and they know how to govern themselves when they send the motion out.

The Chair: On my list I have Mr. Vellacott, Ms. Minna, and Mr. Savage.

Mr. Vellacott, please.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: First I would appeal to Tony off the top. If there's no harm and this is pretty much how we operate and we're in a fairly amicable manner here, then there's really no particular harm in including this level of detail. It doesn't hurt or harm us in any way, but as well it's a protection for the clerk. I don't know—and maybe we could question the clerk—but there may be times when the clerk is under the weather and heads home early. Things come up where the clerk, in fairness and in protection for the clerk, is maybe getting it spun off to her at the very last minute of the day. Maybe she doesn't catch it, and I think probably, in fairness to her, it then allows a kind of latitude as well.

I assume they're dealt with forthwith and distributed pretty quickly by the clerk, but we want to be sure to protect our clerk in this whole thing, so there's not any challenge or controversy around that. I can't see the harm in it personally, if this is our understanding of it anyhow, and I would think that in view of that Mr. Martin would probably be agreeable to the modification here.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Madam Folco.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I suggest you call the vote.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have Ms. Minna, Mr. Savage, Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Lessard, do you want to go with the vote or do you have a comment? I have three people on the list; two people have waived their turn.

If you want to speak, go ahead, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: First of all, I fully agree with Mr. Martin. To my knowledge, we have never had a problem with that.

Unless I am mistaken, because I don't have the French version, what I think we are removing here, from the text I have in front of me which was our previous motion, are the words: “unless there is unanimous consent”.

That provision enabled the committee to make the necessary arrangements, based on the reality of the situation. So I don't see why we would remove it, nor why we would change something that is working well.

I understand that the situation may have caused problems or difficulties on other committees and that there is a desire to introduce that motion here. Mr. Komarnicki's motion may be relevant one day, but for the time being, I don't see the need for trying to bring everything that seems to work best at other committees here.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have no more names on the list.

Mr. Vellacott.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: I understand what his concern is. In fact, you could simply add or subamend it in—just simply add “unless by unanimous consent”, which is a fair and reasonable proposal, I think, onto Mr. Komarnicki's motion.

The Chair: We're on the motion, so are you proposing that you add “unless there is unanimous consent” at the beginning?

• (1205)

Mr. Maurice Vellacott: That's correct.

The Chair: All right.

Just stay with me here. We have a proposal by Mr. Vellacott to add “if there is unanimous consent”. So that's the first thing we're going to be voting on.

I guess the question is whether it's a friendly amendment that's accepted?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm okay with that.

The Chair: So it was a friendly amendment. Okay.

Now we're going to go back to what Mr. Komarnicki suggested in terms of what his motion was.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Could I ask that the motion be read, Mr. Chair, with the amendment that Mr. Vellacott proposed?

The Chair: Yes. It reads:

That unless there's unanimous consent, 48 hours' notice be required for any motion to be considered by the Committee, unless the motion relates directly to the 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 and that the period of notice be calculated from the time the motion has been distributed to the members of the committee by the Clerk of the Committee (not counting weekends).

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We're now going to move to number 10: that copies of the transcripts of all in camera meetings be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee.

That's moved by Madam Folco.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll move to number 11: that the chair be authorized to call the meeting to order no sooner than 15 minutes after the time indicated on the notice as long as four members are present, including an opposition member.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, is motion 11 consistent with the Standing Orders which stipulate that we cannot sit if we do not have a majority of committee members?

[*English*]

The Chair: No. This motion, as I understand it, is to indicate that we can have a reduced quorum in order to be able to begin hearing witnesses. We can sit so that we're not keeping witnesses waiting. It just indicates that as long as four are members present, including at least one opposition member, we can sit.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: I'm having a little trouble with the language here. Help me with this: that the chair be authorized to call the meeting to order no sooner than 15 minutes after the time it... Should that be "no later than 15 minutes"?

The Chair: Sure.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: No. I'm sorry, it should be "no sooner", not before that. Thank you.

It just indicates that we need at least 15 minutes to give members a chance to get to committee. It should be "no sooner". I know it sounds awkward.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Does that mean we don't have to show up until 11:15, Mr. Chair?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Please don't do that to me.

Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Chairman, I want to go back to what I was saying, because I think that the rule is different when, for example, we hear witnesses. We saw that when we did our trip on poverty.

Recommendation 3 covers that provision, as there are two types of meetings. There are meetings where we hear witnesses and working meetings like this one. Motion 11 applies to working meetings like this one. I don't see how we could do the work that we are doing at present if there were only four committee members here.

● (1210)

[*English*]

The Chair: I've just been informed by the clerks that we did deal with this in number three. You are correct. We're going to withdraw that motion because it has been dealt with, Mr. Lessard, in number three.

We dealt with number 12 already, so that takes us to number 13, which is that the clerk circulate to all members of the committee Order in Council appointments referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources.

It's moved by Madam Folco. Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We're going to move to our final routine motion, number 14: that whenever the main estimates or the supplementary estimates are tabled in the House, the committee invite the minister and any relevant senior officials of a department to appear at a meeting of the committee, which is televised if possible; and that whenever a chapter of a report of the Auditor General refers to a subject under the mandate of the committee, the committee invite the Office of the Auditor General of Canada and any relevant senior officials of a department to appear at a meeting of the committee, which is televised if possible.

Mr. Lessard, you're moving that? Thank you very much.

Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chair, I just want to bring up a point. It's not a motion or anything like that.

[*Translation*]

Would it be possible to have access to the same room as often as we can? I understand that sometimes there would be challenges due to television or other events, but as a general rule I would like us to try and keep the same room.

[*English*]

The Chair: From what I understand, the clerks are definitely going to try to request this, if at all possible.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Secondly—and I will say this in French—I would like to see some Perrier water when we order a meal, and not just sweet soft drinks, please.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will also look at that.

Before I adjourn the meeting, I want to suggest a couple of things. I have a couple of names here—Ed, and then Tony—but first, are there any other routine motions that we're missing and that you'd like to see added? Okay. Then let's go with the list we have here. It seems that's where we're at.

Ed.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Some of the other committees have passed this motion regarding priority of legislation: that the consideration and examination of any bill, government or private member's bill, that falls within the express mandate of the committee shall take precedence over any study or non-legislative examination, other than questions of privilege. In such circumstances, the non-legislative study shall be deferred until such time as the bill is reported back to the House.

I would move that motion. It basically means that private members' bills, and bills, take priority over whatever we're studying. It seems to be routine and it makes sense.

I would propose that amendment. I can repeat it, if members wish.

The Chair: Okay. I know this committee has been doing that, so I don't see any problem with it. But let's get a discussion from people. I have a list here.

Mr. Martin, did you want to speak to this? I have you on the old list. You had something you wanted to propose. Can I come back to you, then? Okay.

Starting the new list, I have Madam Folco.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: On Mr. Komarnicki's motion, it seems to me that of the responsibilities Parliament has given committees, the main one is to consider legislation. I am wondering if I am mistaken.

[*English*]

The Chair: You're correct. In the past—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: If our first responsibility is to consider legislation, I think that Mr. Komarnicki's motion is redundant. I do not see the relevance of his proposal.

• (1215)

[*English*]

The Chair: Ed, we'll go back to you, and then Mr. Lessard.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: As to why we may need this, I know that in one of the committees, the immigration committee in fact, we chose to study material rather than deal with, in that case, a government bill. But no matter if it's a private member's bill or a government bill, the bill should take priority and be dealt with. It's just the way the committee decided it, and I think that was not appropriate.

This indicates that you ought to do the main priority or main mandate of the committee, which is to study private member or government bills.

The Chair: On the same topic, I have Mr. Lessard and then Mr. Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I would like Mr. Komarnicki to tell us which committee. Based on the information I have no committees have adopted this recommendation for the following reason, Mr. Chair: each committee is master of its own procedures, and the Speaker of the House reminds us of that often. As a committee, when we are faced with two or three bills, we can decide that a private member's bill may want consideration first. We will debate that here, at the appropriate time. That is the committee's responsibility, according to the Standing Orders.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay, I have Mr. Martin and then Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Tony Martin: I just want to say that I agree with Mr. Lessard on that one.

Again, the committee is in charge of its own agenda, and it decides. I go back to the way we've worked over the last two and a half to three years. We've had times when bills have been in front of us. We've looked at the agenda. We've sorted it out among ourselves in an agreeable fashion, and we've moved forward, you know? We understood that there were, from time to time, some bills that needed to be dealt with, and we found the time to do that, but it didn't preclude us finishing work we were already working on. And we did that in a cooperative way at this committee.

Again, I don't think bringing the experience of other committees to this committee, perhaps to define how it is we will work, is appropriate or acceptable. I think the way we've always worked, deciding as a committee how we're going to deal with the work in front of us, is the appropriate way to go. I would think it's how this place has always worked, how committees have worked, and I think we should continue to do that.

The Chair: I have one person left on the list before we have a vote, and that's Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'll be very brief.

I agree with my colleagues that the committee is the master of its own destiny. But to answer Mr. Lessard's question about what other committees do, we just came from the international trade committee an hour ago, where we had the same discussion and passed this part of the legislation motion. Those are the two committees I'm on, international trade and this one, where I know it has been discussed. That's just for your information.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Lessard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I have an additional argument to make, if I may, Mr. Chair. He says that it was discussed at the committee. Earlier on, Mr. Komarnicki said that it had been adopted in other committees. Have other committees adopted it? We should also know the logic behind it. I could easily give other examples of decisions by other committees that would be in keeping with our views.

So there are two things. First of all, he must tell us which committee adopted it, if any have, and why. If we support the reason fundamentally, we might support the motion. However, up until now, the logic we have used, and that we have been reminded of often by the Speaker of the House, is that we are masters of our procedure and our work. If that is the way it is, we will appreciate that.

Moreover, between you and me, I will acknowledge one thing. Normally, we consider government legislation, as those bills are the ones that normally take priority. But sometimes that is not the case, and the committee must be in a position to appreciate that.

[English]

The Chair: Can I just point out that it was immigration that passed that? And as Ron said, we just passed it at trade. Once again, they are points well taken. We are a committee of our own. We choose our own direction. I understand that as well.

Go ahead.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: For clarification, I didn't say that this motion had passed at immigration, because I'm not aware of whether they had their meeting. I was referencing an example from the immigration committee I was on where this had some relevance.

• (1220)

The Chair: All right, so there's no more discussion on that. We'll call the vote on the motion that has been made.

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: We're going to go back to our original list. I have Mr. Martin, Mr. Savage, and Madame Folco.

Mr. Tony Martin: I just wanted some clarification, Chair. If at the end of a meeting we've run out of time, and some of us may have some pertinent questions we weren't able to put to the witnesses, are we then permitted to table those with the clerk and have them responded to, perhaps at another date, in writing by the witnesses? How does that work?

The Chair: Yes, most definitely.

We'll go to Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: I have two issues, Chair.

First, I wonder if we could ask the minister to come to defend supplementary estimates as early as possible, perhaps next week. That's my first piece.

Second, in terms of what the committee is going to start to undertake right now—some of the members were here before, some are new—we had started a poverty study last year, and I hope it doesn't take us a long time to get back into that. I was wondering, in terms of schedule, whether we could be briefed as a committee on where that study stands right now and on how quickly we could be back up and running on it.

So rather than wait until next week to decide what our first thing would be, is it possible—I'm not sure if it is—that we could be briefed by staff as to where the poverty study sits at this point in time so we can hit the ground running?

The Chair: I'm just going to add two comments before we start.

There are two issues here. One is future business. My suggestion is that we should look at future business next Tuesday. We've already talked to the department in lieu of wanting to brief the minister. The minister has a conflict on Tuesday but is happy to come on Thursday. The challenge with that is, to be up front, that supplementaries are going to be passed and recommendations have to be made 24 to 48 hours in advance. We could still get the minister to come on Thursday. She's prepared her schedule to talk about what is in them, but we won't be able to change them at that point in time.

So I state that for the record as far as the ability is concerned. The challenge I have is, if she is not able to make it on Tuesday, whether you want to see her at this point in time. One of those two meetings should deal with future business. Then over the break week, I suggest that if we decide on Tuesday to move forward with the poverty study, we could then instruct the researchers to have us up to date. I suggest we maybe have department officials come in and we work on the work plan as we move forward.

Those are the two issues.

Mr. Savage.

Mr. Michael Savage: I'm told there has been no agreement with all the parties yet as to when the supplementary estimates will be passed. I would like to have the minister come here at the earliest possible opportunity. We would be prepared to alter our schedule to have her here before they pass and I'm sure others would as well.

I think we should perhaps pass a motion that we'd like to have the minister here as soon as possible to defend the supplementary estimates. I'll come back and maybe make that a motion.

To the other piece, for a number of reasons this committee hasn't sat since last June. That's an extraordinarily long time to go without a committee meeting. The momentum on the poverty study I thought was very good. I just want to make sure we don't take a lot of time getting back up and running. I was wondering, if it is possible, if the committee could be briefed by staff on Tuesday as to where they think we are. If that's to wait until next Tuesday, I'll defer to your judgment on that. I just want to make sure people realize this is an important piece of work. We don't have to reinvent the wheel on this. I'm hoping we can pick up the study largely where we left off in the last Parliament.

The Chair: There are two things here.

My recommendation is that we invite the minister for next Thursday, if that's okay, as a possibility. The second thing is that I could ask the researchers to have the summary of evidence from what we've received. Also, I believe as a committee we need to determine if that's the direction we're heading in. I believe it is. Why don't we talk about future business on Tuesday, along with the summary of evidence? Is that a possibility?

It may not be ready Tuesday, but I think at the very least if poverty is the direction we're going to head back into, on which there could be some consensus, then my suggestion is that over the break week we lay out a work plan, if it's possible. If that's what we decide to do on Tuesday, it would get us off and running when we come back from break week, so that we are ready to go and move forward.

Does that sound like it makes some sense? We talk about future business on Tuesday, including a work plan for after the break, if we should move forward with poverty, and look at inviting the minister on Thursday.

We seem to have consensus, but Mr. Martin, do you have some comments?

• (1225)

Mr. Tony Martin: I have some concern about the minister coming on Thursday. I'm told there's some talk now of the vote on estimates being Thursday evening, which is not fair, actually, to anybody concerned. Why can't she come on Tuesday?

The Chair: I believe there's already been something planned. We can ask the question. I'd be happy to ask the question again, Tony. I just know that they were looking at this and trying to make themselves available. As I said, that does present a problem if the estimates are going to be voted on on Thursday night, because at that point in time any recommendations we have would not work. Once again, we can make the recommendation. The clerk can ask the question. I was just told what her schedule was like at this point in time. That's something we could look at. We could switch around, if that's possible, and look at future business on Thursday.

Mr. Tony Martin: It seems to me, and the government has indicated this, that dealing with the supplementary estimates is a priority. If it's a priority, then part of that process is that the minister appears before the committee to answer questions. I would suggest that a strong message be sent to the minister that she rejig her

schedule so that she can come before committee on Tuesday and can then have some time to review any recommendations we might make here before those estimates are passed on Thursday.

The Chair: Okay, we'll do so.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: The reality is that the estimates have to pass, otherwise the government can't pay its bills. Because we've been out of the House for so long, it really is a matter of urgency and importance. Given all of that, I don't think this committee should pass any estimates without having had a proper time with the minister. Knowing there is no time for any recommendations that might be made to actually find their way into the House, I couldn't vote for them in the House.

If we're serious here, the minister's first priority is this committee. This is where the accountability is. So I would suggest, Mr. Chair, that you bring back to the minister the importance of coming here on Tuesday.

The Chair: Okay, so we'll talk to the minister about coming Tuesday, and we'll look at future business on Thursday.

Is there any other new business or anything we want to discuss at this time?

That was a good job. We're still out of here a little bit early.

The meeting is adjourned.

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