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Tuesday, February 3, 2009

—
Chair

Mr. Derek Lee

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•(1105)

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michel Marcotte): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

[*English*]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair. I'm ready to receive motions to that effect.

Mr. McTeague.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Clerk, it is my honour to move that my colleague Derek Lee be elected chair of this committee.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Are there any other motions?

It has been moved by Mr. Dan McTeague that Derek Lee be elected chair of the committee. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

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

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Before inviting Mr. Lee to take the chair, if the committee wishes we will now proceed to the election of vice-chairs.

The Chair (Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.)): I'd like to nominate Rob Anders for first vice-chair of the committee.

The Clerk: Are there any other motions?

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): I second that motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: The second vice-chair should be from an opposition party other than the official opposition.

Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): I would like to propose Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, madam.

The Clerk: Are there any other further motions?

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

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Martin duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

I now invite Mr. Derek Lee to take the chair.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues, for your confidence, and thank you, Mr. Marcotte, for opening the organization meeting.

I'd like to proceed now to the routine motions normally considered at this meeting.

The clerk will now distribute some proposed routine motions. The copy you will receive in both official languages has both a recommended motion as well as the actual motion adopted by this committee in the previous Parliament for reference.

I know there isn't going to be a lot of debate on these. I suggest, if there is unanimity on this, that following the adoption of the routine motions we consider future business. I'd like someone around the table to propose that when we get to that point, if that's okay.

Colleagues, if you take a look at the list, there are almost 10 areas where we could adopt motions. I'll go through the list, and if a member wishes to move something, indicate so and we will consider it.

The first subject area is the services of an analyst from the Library of Parliament.

•(1110)

Mr. Pat Martin: I so move.

The Chair: I'll let Mr. Martin pick the right motion. It looks like both motions are identical.

Mr. Pat Martin: I was interested in simply replicating the practice of the committee in the last Parliament, Mr. Chairman, so whichever motion would reflect that was my intention

The Chair: Well, in this case it would be column two. Mr. Martin moves that the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist in its work.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll move on to B. Again, the motions appear to be identical.

Mr. Martin is moving—and there may be some discussion on this—that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure be established and be composed of the chair, two vice-chairs, and a member of the other opposition party. That's a subcommittee of four.

Mr. Anders.

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): I realize that most committees adopt this and it's standard pro forma. I know in some committees I've served on in the past.... In order to not burden us with too many committee meetings, I prefer generally to have steering committees, if you will, done as part of a committee of the whole, because it saves us extra committee time and everything else. It certainly doesn't prevent us from passing this motion.

I'm just levelling out my preference on these things.

The Chair: Keeping that in mind then, perhaps we could adopt the motion, and then as the times prevail, we will try to do some future business discussion in the committee of the whole, if I can put it that way.

Would that be acceptable? Mr. Martin has moved the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On C, reduced quorum, these motions are identical as well.

Mr. Warkentin is going to move this.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): There's just one change. In most committees the government member would be the chair. Considering the fact that we are opposition chaired, we might change it from "including one member of the opposition" to say "one member of the opposition and one member of the government".

The Chair: I'm wondering why that didn't get adopted that way in the last Parliament.

Do you have the wording on that, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: I understand the point that Chris is making, but I don't necessarily agree. I think we also have to build in the fact that the government side has the advantage in terms of access to information, etc. I would argue that it's the opposition that needs to question witnesses in any committee more than the government side does, for that very reason—that you have access to all the resources, etc.

I think the reason committees have this reduced quorum, the reason it's necessary even more so.... Let's put our cards on the table. In the last Parliament it became a strategy, with all due respect, of the government side to get up and walk out of meetings if they didn't like the direction the meeting was going in, at which time quorum would be lost and we would lose that day. Witnesses were often flown in from other parts of the country and sent home because the government side was not willing to let the meeting go ahead. The way this is structured here, that wouldn't be possible. As long as three members were present, including one member of the opposition, no such stunts would be possible.

In the interest of getting off to a good start, I think we should maintain the status quo and carry on.

• (1115)

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Martin, I understand your point and I appreciate it, but we are speaking specifically about reduced quorum, not about quorum in general. Quorum in general can still be established without one government member, but reduced quorum would be in the event where only a couple of people show up for a meeting. It just precludes the option of people racing to a committee room—and I'm not suggesting this would happen, but let's just make sure that it won't—and that the opposition just passes a motion to move on with some piece of business at the will of the committee without having time for a government member.

I appreciate you would never do that, so maybe we'll just work on an honour system. I just thought if we're going to put all our cards on the table, that's my concern and that's what I'm trying to avoid.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Anders wanted to speak to this.

Mr. Rob Anders: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would say to Mr. Martin respectfully that I sensed, when this amendment to the motion was put forward, that there was no intention of playing parliamentary silly buggers at all. I think it was just reflecting the fact that this committee is chaired by an opposition member.

I support it, based on the idea that it's only fair that a government member be in attendance at all committee meetings. I don't think there's anything untoward being put forward by it; I think it's just a matter of fairness, given the nature of the structure of the committee.

The Chair: Before we continue debate on this, the wording as proposed now with the amendment of Mr. Warkentin would allow both the opposition and the government side to prevent a meeting from occurring simply by not showing up for the meeting. That seems like a fair bit of equality: either side can prevent a meeting from happening. Hopefully this isn't going to happen to this committee.

Anyway, the debate can continue. I think I saw Mr. Martin first and then Mr. McTeague.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: The last thing I'd add is that Chris's last point isn't really fair, because with a reduced quorum you really can't vote on things, can you? You can only hear witnesses. The idea of allowing a reduced quorum in these rules is so that we don't completely waste a meeting just because too few members show up. You can still hear the testimony of witnesses, but you can't move motions and you can't vote on anything until you get your full quorum back, which would have representation of the other side. This is really only for the purposes of hearing testimony.

The last point I'd make is that your side, Chris, has five members. The odds of getting one here are greater than for us, who have only two, and this other party, who have only two, and the Liberals, who have—and so on. Really, I think you are covered; it does preclude the possibility.

Nobody wants a repeat of the last Parliament, in which many of the committees were almost rendered dysfunctional. I know your committee was not one of those, but some were, and we want to preclude that.

The Chair: Mr. McTeague.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My experience is that these committees will only function if there's goodwill on both sides. Mr. Martin is correct in his assumption and in his point that no motions would be allowed to pass. But let's be very fair. This is a committee that is chaired by the opposition, so it stands to reason that in our rules and consistent with those rules they would word it that one member of the opposition be there.

I think it's very clear that this is simply, and I'll reiterate the point, to have testimony given. If we have a meeting and none of the people can show up, at least the business of the committee cannot be interrupted by what could be dilatory actions. I'm not suggesting for a moment that we shouldn't, for instance, deal with the issue of government members, but it's very clear that this is a sort of de minimis approach to why, I believe, this is here.

Unless I'm given some extenuating reasons, I see no reason to change it, given that the committee is composed very much, by our own rules, as one chaired by the opposition. I think it's consistent with the nature of this committee.

I will admit to you that not since 1994 have I sat on a committee that is governed by the opposition, so I'm still finding my way on this. I think the rule is good and I would probably leave it to work. But for the record, I would suggest that if we run into trouble, we should have the decency to go in camera and talk about this; maybe we can resolve it further down the road. I'm willing to do that.

• (1120)

The Chair: The other way to do this is to put it to a vote. Hopefully it won't be a tie vote.

Is there any way to massage this and get it done now, or do you want to defer? Would you like to defer?

All right, we can call the question on it, then.

Could you repeat the motion, Mr. Clerk, as amended?

The Clerk: Mr. Warkentin moves that the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least three members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the government.

The Chair: We have a tie vote. As I understand it, the chair calls it.

I think in some ways parliamentary precedent allows me a way to do this. In other words, the chair will go with the status quo, and I will simply go with the motion as it was in the last Parliament.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: In this case, the motion does not carry. As a result, we don't have a motion adopted, so we're back to square one.

Let's defer that, unless someone has anything really creative. We're unable to deal with the reduced quorum issue here, so there is no motion on reduced quorum passed. We simply have a vacuum.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Maybe we can have somebody move the.... If it's the will of the committee not to proceed with my motion, then I'd like to have....

The Chair: Your motion has, I think, been defeated.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: It has, and so what I would like to suggest is that we now move the motion in its existing form so that we at least have something on the record, and in the effort to be entirely non-partisan—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: —and conciliatory, I would certainly want to move.... I appreciate that.

The Chair: The chair takes note of the informal discussion.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I'll move what was in the previous Parliament regarding this matter.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Warkentin.

The motion is as printed on the form, Mr. Clerk.

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

The Chair: The next item is distribution of documents. The motion is that only the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the committee and only when such documents exist in both official languages. It's the same in both columns.

Mr. Roy has moved the motion.

Mr. McTeague, on debate.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Chairman, I know that from time to time, given the rapidity of events, and not to take away from the need for both to be produced in both languages, but some provision here, with the consent of the committee....

[*Translation*]

This is a question that will come up very soon. It is possible for documents to be received in one or other language, with the consent of the committee.

An hon. member: It is a matter of principle.

Hon. Dan McTeague: It is always a matter of principle for me. I have no choice.

[*English*]

The Chair: This particular provision is pretty much bedrock around here now. The clerk is not going to act in only one language, and members will take note that if a witness happens to be here, and a witness happens to put a document on the desk of a member, that's acceptable. It's free speech, still, and witnesses can do what they want to do in distributing their documents. But the clerk must operate in both official languages.

We have had Mr. Roy move the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1125)

The Chair: The next motion concerns working meals: that the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees. That's a routine motion.

Mr. Roy moves that motion.

Is there discussion?

Go ahead, Mr. Anders.

Mr. Rob Anders: I know that Mr. Brown and I share sentiments on this. If we will be working through lunches—and the committee has been set to run from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.—I would hope that we see fit to provide a lunch. I know that on some previous committees, we've actually had some discretion with regard to what we wish to see. This may not be the time to raise this point, but I just want to get that on the table, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right.

Let's adopt the motion, as is. Mr. Anders had some comments that pertain to quantity and quality, and we can speak to those later, as the need arises.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next subject is witness expenses. It looks like this motion is identical. Both columns are the same. You're meticulous in your duplication.

Mr. Anders has moved this motion.

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

The Chair: The next motion concerns staff at in camera meetings. Here there is a difference in the two columns. Can we have a mover?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I'd like to move the clause that was adopted in the last Parliament. We found, I think in all parties, that it helped facilitate members from our respective whips' offices coming in during those meetings, or in the event, especially with the New Democratic Party or parties with fewer members, that sometimes it was necessary to have somebody in from the whip's office. We made arrangements in the last Parliament to respect that situation. I think it's reasonable to do it in this Parliament as well.

The Chair: Thank you. It's been moved.

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

The Chair: We now move to motion H, in camera meeting transcripts. It's the same in both columns. The mover is Mr. McTeague.

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

The Chair: Next is notice of motion. The previous committee selected a 48-hour notice period, which your chair is pretty accustomed to.

Who would want to move that?

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Chair, I don't really want to move that, in that I don't agree there should be 48 hours' notice. I'd like it to be one day.

The Chair: Okay. Let's get something moved so we can debate it. Mr. Warkentin is going to move the 48 hours' notice.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: I know that in the last Parliament this committee had 48 hours' notice, but in fact that's a change from the status quo.

I was a member of this committee when it was first structured. We reduced it to one day's notice, to 24 hours, I believe, the reason being that we found it far more conducive to meeting the mandate of the committee if we could not risk losing one meeting. I'm not explaining this well, but if one of the parties had good reason to want an issue dealt with at the Thursday meeting and it was Wednesday noon, the 48 hours' notice meant they would have to wait to the following Tuesday to have something dealt with.

Given the rapidity of events in a minority Parliament, and given the mandate of this particular committee, which may be dealing with the efficacy of public spending associated with the stimulus package, I think it would be useful for the committee to change 48 hours to 24 hours. That is an amendment I would recommend.

The Chair: Okay. Without formally amending the motion, we can just continue debate.

I have Mr. Warkentin and Mr. Anders on the list.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: In this committee, we have adopted 48 hours. In the last Parliament, it seemed to work well. It usually was the case that if somebody wanted to bring a substantive motion to be debated immediately, it was on the issue currently being considered by the committee. We do have provisions within this current order stating that if it is a substantive motion relating to the business under consideration by the committee at the time, we can move with way less time.

I think 48 hours' notice provides every member of the committee some time to at least be prepared for issues that come forward. I think the 48 hours is reasonable in terms of being prepared, but we do have this special provision that if in fact something comes up in committee from a witness, or different things, we can proceed almost immediately because of the provision in this motion. But if we're going to be moving on to something that's entirely new, I think it's reasonable to have 48 hours for preparation.

• (1130)

The Chair: Mr. Anders.

Mr. Rob Anders: Mr. Chair, given the fact that this committee, as far as I understand it, meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 48 hours' notice is perfectly reasonable. Given the fact that we meet only every second day, that being the structure, I'm certainly of the opinion—and I've served 12 years on committees—that I like to have the business dealt with in the regular business hours. I'm not a fan of all sorts of subcommittee meetings, or steering meetings, or everything else. We've had the time set aside, and I think that's the time to deal with these things. Anything that facilitates other silliness, if I may, is extraneous to the purpose here.

I prefer the 48 hours. All the other committees go with that. It makes sense. It's the standard.

The Chair: Mr. McTeague.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Chair, I find myself agreeing with Mr. Anders. I do believe we at least need two evenings. This has been the tried and the true in other committees. I've worked on committees that have had 24 hours. They're very difficult, in that you can see the production of motions ad infinitum, which can have the intended effect, I'm sure, of slowing down the work of the committee or extending it. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but I do think we need a bit of time to pull back.

I would support the status quo of 48 hours.

The Chair: Madame Bourgeois.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I would just like some clarifications, Mr. Chair. Forty-eight hours is really two days, is it not? We are not talking about hours here and there, or half days, but two real days.

I think it is a relevant question. I would like to have it explained.

[English]

The Chair: You're inquiring as to what exactly is 48 hours. I'm just going to check with the clerk to make sure there aren't any practices here. Normally the words mean what they say, but I'll just check with the clerk.

All right, so it doesn't mean what it says. The practice is, for the motion, that the deadline would be 5 o'clock on the second day. I'm sorry, it's not 5 o'clock, it's somewhere around the end of the business day, two days before the motion would come up. So it's not technically 48 hours. It could be 40 hours, it could be 39 hours, but it is, as the clerk points out to me, two sleeps, two nights.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I think it is extremely important to point that out.

[English]

The Chair: Maybe this makes Mr. Martin feel a little bit more comfortable. It's not quite two days.

Having clarified that—thank you, Mr. Clerk—I'm going to invite Mr. Martin to amend this if he wishes, because he hasn't actually formally amended it. Otherwise I'll put the motion with the 48-hour reference in it.

Mr. Martin, do you want to move it?

Mr. Pat Martin: No, Mr. Chair. I don't sense there's interest in changing it, so I'll let it slide.

The Chair: Thank you. So I'll put the motion that contains the 48-hour notice provision.

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

The Chair: The next motion is in regard to time allocation. This is always an interesting biscuit to chew on. If you've had a chance to read it, this committee had a fairly extensive motion adopted on time allocation.

Could I have somebody move it?

Mr. McTeague has moved the motion as printed.

Mr. Martin, in discussion and debate.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Under the first column, whoever produced this document points out that this section varies from one committee to another. It actually varies wildly, with very little rhyme or reason, or logic even, sometimes. I can only argue that in many of the committees I've sat on, five or six committees, the NDP fares better than is contemplated in this outline. I would ask that this committee recognize that in the current Parliament the NDP came back with a greater number of seats. All I would ask is that it go to the makeup of previous committees I've been sitting on, even in the last Parliament, which would be, in the first round, Liberal, Bloc, NDP, government.

I have further recommendations on the second round, but I'm just serving notice, to get the debate going, that we aren't satisfied with the proposal put forward here, and I would argue for marginally and subtly better representation for the NDP in the questioning rounds.

● (1135)

The Chair: I'm going to take advantage of the perceived lull in debate here.

You'll notice that at the beginning of this motion it contains the words "at the discretion of the Chair". This particular chair would take that as a huge commission to edit or massage these rules, because as written this motion is very precise, and in my experience as a chair, it's perhaps a little too precise. I've sat on both sides, government and opposition, and I recall times being in government where the routine was such that you had government members pretty much going to waste while the opposition took time slots. Eventually there evolved this alternating piece so that instead of doing the round, opposition, opposition, opposition, government, and continuing that, there was opposition, opposition, government, opposition, and then alternating back and forth so that everybody on the committee had a reasonable opportunity to participate instead of having some members being left and abandoned until 12:59 or whenever the meeting ended. As a chair, I would try to prevent that from happening.

However, this matter is in your hands, so I'm going to see members here. Which one of you would like to go first?

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I tend to agree. I think you have a good grasp of the issue.

I guess that comes to the crux of the matter. Clearly we're happy that we have more members, that we do have five members on this side, but what happens is that if we have a mechanism that we have around the table, oftentimes there's a situation where you have five members and there's a person who doesn't get to speak during that committee meeting. This committee can often be far less partisan, and the way it often becomes less partisan is when we actually bring issues that concern each of our ridings. I think it's important that we have representation from the different areas. It's not necessarily a party issue. I know in the last Parliament we discussed the issue of passport services, and every person on this side of the table had a very different perspective from one another, based on their own experience from their own community.

So I think it's important that we have a system—and I think you've outlined one—where every member gets some opportunity to bring their concerns forward and to represent their perspectives around this table. I think that might be one way we can reduce the partisan nature of this, by giving everybody an opportunity to question and to bring their different perspectives forward.

The Chair: As a chair as well, just before I go to other members, I would tend to want to avoid a situation where I was recognizing somebody for a second round, or even a third round, when there was a member who hadn't had a first round. I would not want to be bound, as chair, to see that happen.

Mr. Brown, and then Mr. McTeague.

• (1140)

Mr. Patrick Brown: My point was just similar to Mr. Warkentin's. I believe the principle that everyone should have an opportunity to have at least one question. I think the format can constrict that. As long as we don't tie your hands to enable that, I don't think it would be in the best interest of the committee.

The Chair: We still have to get some wording here that works for us.

Mr. McTeague.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to see the direction you've taken here.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to point out, just so that all members here are aware, that circumstances like that—and it often happens that a witness appears only for half an hour or an hour—would not necessarily allow all members, or all parties, to ask questions.

We should specifically consider the fact that witnesses will be here for a very short time. With that in mind, the length of time indicated here seems just and fair to me.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Bourgeois, and then Mr. Martin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I would just like to support what Mr. McTeague has just said. As a long-time, venerable member of this committee, I would like to tell you that we have never had problems about questions. Everyone has had the opportunity to ask questions. Even the chair was involved on occasion. We have all had the right to speak.

I think that we can trust our chair. It will be up to him to see that everyone can speak. I do not see why we would change things. But I understand your position. Even the Bloc stepped aside on occasion to give the New Democratic Party a chance to speak. It is all about using good practices in the committee.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Martin.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: You know, I can understand there's goodwill in the air, lots of bonhomie and goodwill, but we do have to have some agreed-upon structure. I've always thought we should have strict rules and loose enforcement of the rules, just so that there are rules and structure to fall back on in case things fall apart in terms of the goodwill.

I would point out that in the first round what's contemplated, or past practice, favours the other parties disproportionately. Looking back to the origins of the whole committee structure, it's an opportunity for the opposition parties, I believe, to get down to the truth. Often the government knows the truth. They're the government; they have access to all the books, access to information. We're trying to beaver our way through the smokescreens to get to the bottom of substance from the witnesses. This is why most other committees have the opposition parties asking questions first and then the government.

So I would suggest that the first round should be the official opposition, the Bloc, the NDP, and then the government, and cap it off there.

I think the really weighted part is in the second round here, because listen to this, Mr. Chairman: it goes Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, and then the NDP. Well, we're packing it home with our lunch kits by then, because the witnesses are gone.

I won't accept that, Mr. Chairman. I don't think that's fair. In the interest of fairness, I think we should repeat the same order in the second round—official opposition, Bloc, NDP, and government—and keep doing that as many rounds as we can get in, with all the flexibility and discretion of the chair that you began your remarks with.

I would be a lot happier if the official structure said official opposition, Bloc, NDP, government for the first round, and do it again for the second round—and the third, if there's time.

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I don't want to belabour this issue, but I sat in the last Parliament, and I was pleased with the way we constructed things in the last Parliament. I understand Mr. Martin's concern with regard to getting the answers out of government, but my experience, having sat in this committee, is that more often than not the witnesses were not from government. They weren't ministers. We were looking for information about how we could prepare reports from often the private sector, oftentimes unions, oftentimes people with very specific desires and thoughts on what the government should employ. It was important that we had representations from every party.

I take Mr. Martin's point that in certain circumstances there are going to be times when we may know a little bit more information than he does. I respect that, and I'm not going to deny that. What I am going to suggest is that more often than not there are situations where we are all at the same position. We all have no clue as to who is coming forward in terms of the background information.

So I would suggest that giving every opportunity for each member of the committee to get up and to question is important. The way it worked in the last go-round—hopefully this is the most contentious debate we have in this committee—is that, as Diane mentioned, oftentimes we would give our questioning time to another party if in fact there was a member of another party who had a real desire to get some information from the witnesses.

I'm comfortable with the way it worked in the past, and I'm hopeful that we can continue to move in that direction. If we're going to go by seats, I guess we could have the Liberals giving up one of their spots to the New Democrats on this, but I don't sense that this is the case, so....

Well, when you look at the number of members around the table, that's what we'd have to do if in fact we were going to give another spot to the New Democrats. I guess you guys can work that out amongst yourselves, and possibly you could just be generous down the road and offer that speaking spot to Mr. Martin from time to time.

● (1145)

The Chair: Let's keep in mind that this committee is a committee of members and not a committee of political parties.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Every member has to be respected, irrespective of what party. I appreciate Mr. Martin's desire to ensure that the rules do not box in the New Democratic Party to one and a half time slots, or however it works out—I'm exaggerating a little bit—and I'm sure most members at this non-partisan stage of the committee's work would agree that there's no need to box in a particular party, the government side or the opposition side.

There were other members who did want to speak.

Mr. Anders.

Mr. Rob Anders: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I support the existing time allocations. Previously I was chair of the veterans affairs committee, and I think that if Mr. Martin were to ask Mr. Stoffer—who was on that committee with me—he would say I was very generous toward his participation. There were some times when Mr. Stoffer was not able to attend the full committee meeting and only attended the first part. I was very generous with regard to the opposition who remained, and sometimes I would allocate positions depending upon who was there and who showed interest.

I think it's important, though, that when you set the time allocations, you don't start off in a partisan way trying to limit members—especially new committee members on the government side, for whom this is their first committee experience, who want to have a chance to participate and to ask questions and do something useful for their country and their constituents—or sideline them for partisan considerations.

The Chair: Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Chair, very briefly, I can't let that go.

First of all, the allocation of questions is by party; it's not by individual. If this committee wants to do it differently, then we should name each individual: Martha Hall Findlay will speak first, and then Rob Anders will speak second. We don't do it that way; we do it by party.

If the Conservative Party wants to let some of their rookies get up first and ask questions, that is the choice they should make, just as we will with our time allocation. But it should be allocated fairly, in proportion to the seats you have in the House, as closely as possible. We have to have speaking times that, to the degree possible, accurately reflect the proportions in the House. The NDP under this configuration gets badly shortchanged. So in the interests of getting this committee off to a fair start and in the interests of non-partisan fairness, we deserve more time.

Rob, you're asking us to buy a bit of a pig in a poke, saying, well, the chair can be fair and distribute time fairly, you know. We want rules that reflect that, and that's what we're asking the committee to recognize.

● (1150)

The Chair: In the interests of trying to bring this to a close, I'll say that the current wording is relatively strict; it doesn't seem to allow much room for discretion at all. I personally don't like the current wording, but I'm in the chair and I'm not out where you are, so I am hopeful there will be some constructive suggestion.

One thing I could throw out for your consideration is to delete all of the wording after the description of the five-minute rounds. It would read “and that thereafter, five (5) minutes, including the response of the witness, be allocated”, and we would stop there and insert the following words “alternating between parties and among members” So the chair would have an eye to the parties and members as the rounds were distributed. So we'd have the first round followed by all of the second and third rounds, but with alternation.

That's more or less what I've been used to, either in practice or in written rules, in my committee service; but if members want to construct something more precise, you're at liberty to do it. The trick now is to get that proposed at this time.

Mr. McTeague, then Monsieur Roy.

Hon. Dan McTeague: There may have been wisdom provided by Mr. Warkentin in his comments reflecting on the number of times. Let it be very clear that we want this committee to work, as Liberals, as we do in other committees here.

Mr. Martin raises some very important points with respect to the amount of time that the New Democrats do not get to speak, and I would suggest, in an offer of goodwill, that we would be willing to allocate in the second round our second position, which would then read “Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois, Conservative Party, New Democratic Party”. The latter would be changed—instead of Liberal Party.

But I would also caution that where we go from there is that it would give the New Democratic Party a third one, after the Bloc Québécois. But I see the essence there, since my party, the Liberal Party, would be speaking twice in the first round. We'd certainly want to see some levelling there.

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin, did you want to add something at this point?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Maybe I can just get clarification. Right now it reads "Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, New Democrat". Mr. McTeague, are you suggesting that we then scratch out that Liberal and go directly to...?

The Chair: Could I clarify that what we're talking about here is the second round and not the first round. Mr. Warkentin is only talking about the second round. I want to comment on the first round, but we'll come back to that later.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Chair, I just wanted to make it clear that I was referring to the second round.

The Chair: Therefore, Mr. Warkentin may want to reread.

Mr. Anders, in the meantime, do you want to comment? It's not necessary.

Mr. Rob Anders: I understand. If an accommodation has been worked out among the opposition, then I will hold my tongue.

The Chair: Does anybody else on the opposition side want to speak to this? While Mr. Warkentin is doing his math, I want to address the lineup for the first round. And I'm certainly in your hands, but I don't like giving the first three rounds to the opposition parties and then going to the government. Because there is often an opposition perspective on things and a government perspective, leaving the government perspective to the last is sometimes unhelpful, and for that reason, some committees do the first two rounds in opposition, then go to the government round, then go back to the opposition. I think that's a more equitable way to do this, but if members want to retain the Liberal, Bloc, NDP, and then government first round, we certainly can. That's okay. I just like the other lineup a little better.

So I'll stop there. We're now back on the second-round issue, and I'll take any interventions on that.

Mr. Martin.

• (1155)

Mr. Pat Martin: I want to thank the Liberals for the math they did and for the compromise they put forward. I appreciate that very much, and in round two we'll be very satisfied with that generous offer.

It doesn't change my concerns about round one, though. Whether you have the way you like it—two opposition, one government, and back—I don't see why it carries on afterwards. I think round one is going to be an awfully long round of seven and eight minutes if you go back to the Liberals and back to the Conservatives and still call that round one. I consider round one to be one complete round in which each party speaks, and then we begin round two, and then we begin round three.

Could I ask—and this is the last thing I'll intervene on—that round one be considered a four-part round of each party speaking once?

The Chair: Unless I've misread it, that's how the first round is shown—each of the parties. Have I misread it?

Mr. Pat Martin: No, it's not. It says Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, New Democrat, Liberal, Conservative.

The Chair: I tend to agree with Mr. Martin on this. That's a round and a half.

I understand why political parties get a slightly bigger first round, but that is a first round.

In contention here we have the issue of the first round in some way and then the second round.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I have no problem changing the first round, because it is the eight-minute round, and I think everyone can establish their position or question in depth or in detail. My concern is that if we drop the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party before we move to the second round, we still have the issue of getting.... I guess I'm just concerned about the members on this side all getting an opportunity to voice something during the rounds. So I want to make sure we haven't reduced the ability for them to get up by doing this, but I have no problem at least dropping the eight minutes to five minutes, moving into that second Liberal and Conservative question.

The Chair: I apologize. I have been misreading this as well. I am sorry if I've misled people.

Anyway, I hear what you're saying, Mr. Warkentin. You would be comfortable clipping the first eight-minute rounds for the four parties. Four eight-minute rounds—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: But I'm still concerned. I'm not sure I'm prepared to just drop the Liberal and the Conservative question.

The Chair: You want to move it over to the second round. Okay.

Would there be a consensus then to call the first round four eight-minute rounds, set out as it is here—Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, NDP—then move to a second round? We will still have to construct that.

Mr. McTeague, on that.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Chair, Mr. Martin has indicated it's the first round that is of interest to him and his party. I see no objection to the first round being changed so that all parties have one, as it were, kick at the can.

However, that would mean that in order to capture what Mr. Warkentin has said, and what I have suggested here, to reflect the representation of the committee more accurately in the House and on committee, we would then leave the second round the way it is drafted.

• (1200)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: So we would drop the two in the first round, and then go to the original of the second round. I think that is a valuable compromise, and I'm prepared to support that.

The Chair: At this particular moment, Mr. Martin is not available. But I do note that if we were to adopt it as it's currently being discussed, the NDP would have an opening round and one second round and that's it.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I think Mr. Martin's concern was that they'd miss the second round because of time constraints, but I think we have addressed that by scrapping the two eight-minute rounds earlier on. I don't want to speak on his behalf if in fact that's not his concern.

The Chair: Mr. Thibeault, do you have thoughts?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Welcome to my first committee meeting, eh?

The Chair: I want to note that Mr. Thibeault is joining us from the NDP.

Mr. Thibeault.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Just so I understand what is being proposed, we have Liberal, Bloc, Conservative, New Democratic in the first round. Is that correct? The Liberal and the Conservative Party questions from that first round have now been moved to the second round. They have been cancelled out, right? But the generous offer by the Liberals now has been changed, so we're actually going back to Liberal, Bloc, Conservative; Liberal, Conservative, Bloc, and then the New Democrats.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I don't think there would ever be a time that we wouldn't get to that second New Democratic slot. I think the concern originally, especially in a condensed meeting, was that possibly you'd only get one opportunity to speak. But this for sure allows a second round for the New Democrat member, because of the—

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Martin's original concern was related to time, so if we're eliminating the two at the front, then the time issue shouldn't be a factor.

The Chair: Mr. McTeague pointed out that eliminating those two first-round slots will involve about 16 minutes.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Okay.

The Chair: I think we have reached an agreement here. I will point out that there is a discretionary element wedged in at the front, but your chair will certainly want to follow the rules.

I'll note that Mr. Martin isn't actually here right now, so in the event he wants to bring this back at another time, I hope members will be prepared to hear him.

An hon. member: Agreed.

The Chair: I'll just make sure the clerk has it accurately.

Do you want to read it?

The Clerk: The motion goes as follows: that witnesses be given five to ten minutes to make their opening statement; that at the discretion of the chair, during the questioning of witnesses there be allocated eight minutes for the first questioner of each party, including the responses of the witnesses as follows: Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois, Conservative Party, and New Democratic Party, and that thereafter five minutes, including the responses of witnesses, be allocated to each party as follows: Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois,

Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Conservative Party.

The Chair: That's great. Thank you very much.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: As I mentioned earlier, I'd like to take a few minutes to look at future business. The reason I want to do this—and we'd have to do it pretty much unanimously—is that most committees take about three weeks to get up and running. That's always been a frustration. I think we can get up and running as soon as Thursday, or maybe next Tuesday, depending on what we think we might like to do, because there are some nationally important economic issues related to the current economic recession.

The supplementary estimates (B) have also been referred to the committee. They have been introduced in the House, and I'm advised that at some point the government and the opposition parties will want to sink their teeth into those in the House. These are estimates that would have been introduced in the House at the end of last year but were not because of the election and prorogation. So they're a little behind schedule, and there will be some quarters in government that would want to see that move ahead quickly.

I had hoped members would take an interest in the issue of stimulus spending, with reference to both the supplementary estimates and the budget as it was read in the House last week. I'm certainly in your hands. We're speaking of immediate future business and whether we can get something nailed down for Thursday.

I should point out that I've asked the clerk if he would ask Statistics Canada about the possibility of inputs for this week—including those from the Privy Council—on the issue of stimulus spending. These issues are in your hands. If we choose to go ahead, those institutions will at least have some notice.

Madame Bourgeois.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Chair, before the last Parliament ended, we were studying a matter that the committee considered very important, the federal government's procurement process. If I recall correctly, we began the study partly as a result of the tabling of a report from the Auditor General of Canada. But it was also in the government's plans and priorities to be able to get a handle on and tighten up the federal government's procurement process.

I even submitted a motion about it to the clerk last week, though it may not have been in order at the time. But I know that he already has a motion in his hands. In it, I proposed that, after our committee had passed the supplementary estimates and done what it needs to do at the beginning, of course, we should continue our study of the federal government's procurement process as a matter of priority.

Secondly, I would very much like you to allow us to submit motions to our clerk dealing with other matters that we would like the committee to address.

[English]

The Chair: On your second point, Madame Bourgeois, were you referring to this 48-hour notice or were you referring to matters coming within the field of study?

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: No, I prepared a motion that I submitted to the clerk, perhaps a little too soon, so that we can study the process. In the previous Parliament, we had started to look at matters that we were not able to complete. I would like to bring them to your attention so that we can discuss them. Can we send this information to the clerk, as motions or as agenda items, to be considered again at the next meeting?

[English]

The Chair: Okay, this is what we'll do. You actually have a formal notice of motion here. We'll take that as notice. We don't have to debate or vote on it today, but I should ask the clerk to generate a document that will show us the work of the committee in session 39-2. Then we could reflect on that and, if so advised, bring forward the business unfinished by the committee for work here.

If you would generate that, it would be of help. Thank you.

•(1210)

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: There are several things from the last Parliament that should at least be reviewed at this point. The issue of procurement was one of them. I think we will want to take a look at that.

We were also doing a review of the demographic challenges within the federal public service. It was related to the renewal process of the public service. Our committee identified that in many areas of the federal government, there was a 75% turnover rate within a single year within certain departments. If that is not an issue of efficiency, and if that is not an issue that should be looked at by somebody—especially during these times when we are going to see massive amounts of procurement and massive amounts of spending, and when only 25% of the people have a corporate memory that spans back even a year—we're going to run ourselves into some situations. Maybe it is time—and I recognize with the growing civil service that people are moving on and different things—that we want to get a handle on this. It might be an opportunity for us to have Ms. Barrados before our committee and get an update as to what has happened since the last time we spoke with her on this issue and what mechanisms they have put into place to resolve some of this.

Some of the greatest weaknesses for us as a government are these issues we have identified. We have the demographic challenges, but we also have this challenge of people who are leaving and vacating their spots. There is a lot of movement, which means there are a lot of challenges presented as a result of this movement and different things. I think we have a responsibility, in this committee, to get a handle on this.

The Chair: Mr. Anders had indicated a desire to speak to this. Is there anyone else?

Mr. Anders.

Mr. Rob Anders: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I come to this committee new. I'm sure that over the 12 years I have probably substituted for somebody on this committee, but I was not a regular member, so for me and for others who are new to the committee, I think that maybe an overview briefing with various departments and agencies that report—Privy Council Office, Public Works and Government Services Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat, the Public Service Commission—as well as maybe a specific briefing on the estimates process and government procurement might be in order. Our Bloc Québécois colleague has mentioned that.

Mr. Chair, I know you had an interest in a budgetary stimulus investigation, and I wonder whether or not that would fit in a review of management accountability framework.

The Chair: It might indeed. I should point out that staff indicates the Public Service Commission has publicly issued a report that deals at least in part with this turnover issue. That was last November, and there has been some informal indication of interest in taking the issue up with the committee. This has to do with public service staff.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: It would be wise to have her before the committee to guide us.

The Chair: We'll pick our witnesses, but the issue certainly...

Mr. Gourde.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you for giving me the floor, Mr. Chair.

I agree wholeheartedly with my colleague Mr. Anders. Before moving to one of the topics mentioned here or that could be brought forward later, I would like our officials to brief new members before we get involved in matters like demographic changes, for example. Then we would all be seeing the task in the same way. It would surely be good for us to remind ourselves of the decisions and the challenges.

Our committee has a good deal of responsibility. The responsibility extends to overseeing the accounts of new departments and organizations. In that context, it could be interesting.

I do not know whether you on the other side would like a briefing.

•(1215)

[English]

The Chair: It's certainly possible for members to arrange for briefings from departments. They would love to do it in twos, threes, and fours rather than ones. So in the event that briefings are coming up, there's no need to take up committee time to receive a briefing. It's a little like a seminar, and they're very useful to members. If members have arranged one, please let the clerk know. Other members may wish to attend or take advantage of that.

Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I would just like to say to Mr. Gourde that each department could well give a briefing, but we have our researchers too. When I started, I was very fortunate to be able to have them come to my office. They told me a little about how things worked. So many things go on here. At times, researchers can come to our offices to help. As the chair said, I would not look kindly on our committee spending its time on it. Unfortunately, we have to operate with old minutes, to do our own research and to use the services of our researchers.

I would like to continue with the matters on our plate. There was another matter that meant a huge amount of work for the committee in the previous session, accrual accounting. Our subcommittee worked on it. Treasury Board told us that, in the next session, we could ask how it was progressing towards setting up this famous accrual accounting. We even asked the Auditor General of Canada to come, since she has mentioned it in her reports for 10 years. It was extremely important because accrual accounting and strategic planning can go hand in hand. Mr. Chair, I think it is extremely important for us to look at it, especially since the committee has specifically asked to look at the finances a little more closely.

There is one last matter I would like to look at, building leases. This is linked to human resources too. In the last budget, the government dealt with building leases. I would like the committee to study it. Correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Clerk, but that was an important topic two sessions ago. When the government sold seven buildings, it took in \$1.4 billion. Possibly the government—and when I say the government, I really mean officials—wants to sell more buildings. There are thirty or so that could be sold, I believe. It would be good to know if a planning process has been established for those buildings, how much we are intending to get for them, and so on. Researching buildings goes hand in hand with where to put our workers. That affects the matter Mr. Warkentin brought up and it is extremely important also.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. McTeague.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Chair, at the risk of sounding redundant—at some point I was in conversation on another matter of the committee—I want to make it abundantly clear that we probably have an interest in continuing where we left off. In that regard, I support the comments made by members who were here before. But it seems to me there should also be at least a broad outline of the more pressing business that will no doubt confront this committee in a matter of days. That will deal with the supplementary estimates from last year, because we did not sit, and issues we are going to be facing, as well as the question of disposition of stimulus, which I think will preoccupy much of the committee's work for at least the foreseeable future.

What I'd like to get from the chair, the clerk, and researchers is a broad outline of just how much time we'll be looking at to consider these two Herculean tasks that are going to beset us in the not-too-distant future.

• (1220)

The Chair: Mr. Brown.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with what Mr. McTeague is suggesting about the need to look at stimulus spending sooner than later. I think that would be a great start for our committee. I'm not sure, as Madam Bourgeois has suggested, that we need to look at accrual accounting again. The last committee looked at that in depth and produced a report in December 2006. I worry that we'd be repeating ourselves and not using time productively if we took that approach.

One thing I'd be interested in is the greening of government buildings and operations. We talked about looking at that before, but haven't gone into it in depth. It's something that I think government operations could be productive with.

The Chair: Good.

Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Clearly, I assume that we are going to prioritize these matters at our next meeting. I am in favour of stimulating the economy. I have no problem on that score, but I am not sure that it is the main priority at present. In fact, we should give the government time to get its budget working. I think it is important; we have to give them time to start spending the money before we can see if it was well spent. We will likely see by the end of March. They said three months, so let us say April, perhaps. Mr. Chair, the committee has never been incapable of doing two or three tasks at the same time, depending on the availability of witnesses.

That said, it is perhaps possible to decide that one day, Tuesday, for example, we would look at matters of one kind and look at another kind on Thursday. As I said earlier, it depends on the availability of witnesses, on our research staff, our clerks, and so on.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: We've made a good start, colleagues. I have listed seven subjects from around the table: procurement, public service staff turnover, accrual accounting, sale of government assets, greening of government operations, stimulus package, and supplementary estimates. This list is going to have to go to informal discussion among members and to the steering committee, if necessary. We'll bring it back to discuss here as future business.

In the meantime, now we have to pick something short-term that will get us up and running. I had hoped that members would want to take a preliminary look at stimulus spending across government as we move into a phase during which the government will be attempting to implement its budget. I had hoped we would be able to come back here on Thursday and review two aspects of the stimulus spending envelope. One is where stimulus spending should be targeted. Where is it best targeted? It's not a precise science. Some of that data can come from Statistics Canada.

The other side of it would be the driver of the stimulus spending. That is, somewhere around the Privy Council and the Treasury Board, somewhere there is a departmental perspective on how the stimulus spending will be rolled out. There will be some obstacles in terms of parliamentary passage. There may be other obstacles we're unaware of. But as they pertain to government operations and the way government is going to embark upon this, I think we should get a snapshot as it begins.

The following week I think we should be prepared to have our first hearings on the supplementary estimates. These estimates are going to have to be reported back to the House by a specific date. I understand that there are negotiations between the parties now about when that date should be. The rules, I think, provide a date. Maybe I'll just ask the staff now.

Is there a date provided for in the Standing Orders?

The Clerk: Yes.

•(1225)

The Chair: The clerk has the date when the supplementary estimates already referred to us must be reported back to the House.

The Clerk: Actually, the standing order states that it should be done before March 26 or three days before the last day of the supply period. That date is still unknown. At the latest, it's going to be March 26, or it can be anytime before that.

The Chair: So we still have six or seven weeks. This is the supplementary estimates we're talking about.

The Clerk: Yes, but it could be earlier, depending on when the last supply day will be.

The Chair: Yes, but we have weeks. Your chair had been led to believe that the government wanted to move that up, because it was late anyway. We'll just have to stand advised until whenever those negotiations conclude. At this time, we have approximately seven weeks. It could be six weeks. It could be five weeks. The government and the opposition parties have a mechanism for selecting the last day of the supply period for debate in the House. That date has not yet been selected, as the clerk points out. It's roughly six weeks, plus or minus a week, that we have to look at the supplementary piece. We could look at that next Tuesday. We could begin hearings on the supplementary estimates. There would be a rather pro forma presentation, I presume.

Maybe the clerk could indicate who would be the first witnesses on the supplementary estimates.

The Clerk: Usually our committee—

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I do not understand at all. Let us speak the same language, Mr. Chair. First, what do you mean by supplementary estimates? I do not think we are seeing things the same way.

Second, is talking about the supplementary estimates going to take us six weeks? Do you mean the budget he has given us?

[English]

The Chair: No, Madam Bourgeois.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Really, I do not understand at all.

[English]

The Chair: The supplementary estimates have been introduced into the House. All of those estimates have been formally, by the rules, referred to this committee for study and reporting back. That is a routine parliamentary supply procedure.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Yes.

[English]

The Chair: Normally those supplementary estimates are introduced before the end of the year. In this case, they had to wait until Parliament came back in the new year. They're a little bit behind schedule. I'm indicating that we have an obligation under the parliamentary rules to take a look at them, to at least look at them—

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: But that does not take five minutes.

[English]

The Chair: —and if so advised, report back to the House. I'm suggesting that we do so next Tuesday, that we have them presented with the first set of witnesses for one meeting.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Ah, you mean one day only.

[English]

The Chair: Only one meeting.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I thought it was going to take six weeks.

[English]

The Chair: I'm embarking on the same road as you have suggested, which is that we can carry on more than one task at one time.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: My apologies.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: My understanding is that there's an all-party discussion right now on having the vote on supplementary estimates in the House on February 12, so next Tuesday would be the last day that our committee could do it. I think it's probably advisable that we consider it either on this coming Thursday, two days from now, or else on Tuesday, because otherwise we're going to be high and dry. They'll be considered as having been referred, but I'd like to see them at this committee before that time.

•(1230)

The Chair: If the House believes this committee could do anything but take a cursory look at these estimates and get it reported by next Tuesday... We in fact could not look at it next Tuesday and report back by next Tuesday. It could not be done.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: No, it's Thursday. February 12 is a Thursday. But I take your point, in that it's still a constrained timeframe.

The Chair: That's two days before. That is, in theory, doable. Thank you for that.

The clerk has just said that we need three days to get a report into the House. Of course, there are reports and there are reports. If the report simply says that we looked at it, it's okay, see you later Jack....

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Maybe we could look at supplementary estimates this Thursday, not tomorrow but the following day.

The Chair: In theory, we could. The issue is what witnesses might be available.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: They're all eager to come and testify, I'm sure.

The Chair: Let's see about that. Thank you.

Mr. McTeague.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Chair, I have no difficulty with doing this as early as possible if it's going to be one day, but we don't know that yet. I think there seems to be an interest in doing this as early as Thursday, but it depends on what happens. I don't know if the standing rules allow us to receive that, but I think there's certainly a drift here, or maybe I could call it a consensus, to receive this earlier.

Ms. Hall Findlay may have a comment about this as well, Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Hall Findlay.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): I think the concern is not so much that we start this quickly but whether there might be enough time. I think that at the very least we're all in agreement that we should start this and get as much done as possible on Thursday. Is that fair?

The Chair: Okay, within the next few hours we will attempt to assure ourselves of appropriate witnesses to deal with the whole supplementary estimates (B) this Thursday. If members wish to have a particular witness invited, they should advise me and/or the clerk to ensure that invitation is extended or at least cleared.

Okay, we have breaking news. The three-day report preparation period described by the clerk was based on existing procedures and resources. Apparently he has just been advised that the House

leaders are discussing the possibility of increasing the resources available so that the three-day work time becomes a one-day work time, so we could complete a report and have it into the House a day later. I don't know if that's 24 hours or one sleep, but that is a work in progress; it's not clear yet. In any event, based on the factors out there, we should try to get the supplementary estimates started this Thursday. We'll figure out where we go after that.

In the meantime, if it's okay with you, I'll work up something on the stimulus spending side but won't insert it into our agenda until we have a reasonable consensus and we're sure we can complete the supplementary estimates piece.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I'd like to move a motion that we proceed with the agenda item to look at the supplements this coming Thursday, with the exception that if you're unable to get witnesses, we'd move it to Tuesday.

The Chair: All right, that captures the essence of it. I like that motion.

Mr. McTeague.

• (1235)

Hon. Dan McTeague: I appreciate the need for a motion, but I think there is certainly consensus. I don't think we need to go through a formal process. I think it is very clear on the record that we follow the discretion of the chair, and I agree with Mr. Warkentin.

The Chair: I see heads nodding around the table. There are no dissenters.

Congratulations, we've captured our future business without having to wait two weeks to talk about it. I congratulate all the members.

Is there any other business we need to take care of before we adjourn?

Thank you, colleagues. We're adjourned.

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