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Standing Committee on Natural Resources

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EVIDENCE

Monday, October 5, 2009

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Chair

Mr. Leon Benoit

Standing Committee on Natural Resources

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• (1535)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Carol Chafe): Honourable members, I see a quorum.

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

Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): I move to elect Leon Benoit.

The Clerk: Mr. Hiebert has nominated The Chair to be chair.

Are there any further motions?

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Leon Benoit duly elected chair of the committee.

Before inviting Mr. Benoit to take the chair, we'll now proceed to the election of the vice-chairs.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): I will nominate Mr. Tonks.

The Clerk: May I do the script first?

I am now prepared to receive motions for the position of first vice-chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

It has been moved by Mr. Anderson that Mr. Alan Tonks be elected as vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further nominations or motions to that effect?

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Tonks duly elected first vice-chair.

I am now prepared to receive motions for the second vice-chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must also be a member of the opposition.

Madame Brunelle.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): I nominate Nathan Cullen.

[English]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Madame Brunelle that Nathan Cullen be the second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Nathan Cullen duly elected second vice-chair.

I would now like to invite Mr. Benoit to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC)): Is there any other business this committee would like to deal with today? There is nothing else on the agenda.

Mr. Regan.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I move that a subcommittee on agenda and procedure be established and be composed of one member of each party, and that the chair of the committee sit ex officio to chair the subcommittee meetings. I have a motion here in English and in French.

The Chair: Yes, this is in order. This meeting actually deals with the election of the chair and vice-chairs but also with the rules under which the committee operates. This is in order. We've talked about this before on many occasions, but I look forward to what the members of the committee have to say.

I see Mr. Trost and I see Mr. Cullen. First of all, Mr. Regan, would you like to speak to your motion?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We've had past discussions about what the committee should be discussing, what we should be doing, and what studies we should undertake. Frankly, I expect that to continue here at the full committee; however, it seems to me that a steering committee could play a positive role in working out what witnesses would come before the committee for meetings. This has been a concern of mine of late. I think it would be helpful to have a committee to play that role.

The Chair: We've heard Mr. Regan.

I'll now go to Mr. Trost, then Mr. Cullen, and then Madame Brunelle.

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): I know various members of Parliament have varying experience. For just over five years—three elections—I've now been on committees in the House of Commons, mostly natural resources and industry and immigration committees. In any of the committees I've sat on for a long period of time, we have never had any subcommittees for anything, and I thought they always worked fairly well. You need input from every member. As much as the party hierarchy likes to think that everyone always thinks the same from every party, we're somewhat different.

This has been generally a fairly low-key, collegial committee. I can think of a few exceptions over the last four or five years, but it's a fairly low-key, collegial committee. I wouldn't want something whereby you'd have a sort of inner group and an outer group.

It has worked fairly well, so I don't see why we should rock the boat. If there are concerns, there are other ways we can deal with them informally, because I think by and large we've tried to be cooperative with everyone.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

The reason I'm going to support Geoff's motion on this subject is due to a concern I've raised with you, Chair, in the past session. It's not so much to Mr. Trost's comment about the collegiality and informality; I think that generally speaking it does work well.

I think there is a role the subcommittee could help with. As it is right now, and I would think this should continue, the committee sets the general tone, direction, and course of study. I think we can do that at large, balancing all the different duties and interests we have. But it comes to a discussion about the witnesses and who's being brought forward.

The system we have now is to simply dump all the names into the hat, and the chair and the clerk work through them and balance it out. I've expressed concerns about communication, because sometimes it doesn't feel that the panels or the format we get are balanced. I'm not casting aspersions, but once we have the study we want to do set out—we want to do three weeks on this or two weeks on that—we should then ensure that everybody's mutual interests are met in terms of the panel, which we all know, as members, is critical.

The panel can help guide us significantly. Some of the upcoming issues are quite sensitive. We might be dealing with things about eco-energy and nuclear energy. Some of these things are broad and can be quite contentious. A subcommittee can play a very specific and formal role that way. The general tone and the direction of study is, I think, set well by this committee, but it's that second piece.

We've gone back and forth with this, Chair, as you know, raising concerns and trying to address them, but it didn't really work out in the last session to our satisfaction.

• (1540)

The Chair: Mr. Anderson has a point of order.

Mr. David Anderson: I would like us to take a break so that we can get a copy of the motion. I have nothing here. I've had no discussion with anyone about this, which is causing us some concern

and may end up making for a long meeting. It's whatever you decide, but I don't even have a copy of the motion.

The Chair: We should have a copy of the motion in front of everyone before we have our discussion and vote on this, if any member feels that it's required.

I will suspend for a couple of minutes so that we can get copies of the motion, and until we're prepared for further discussion. I will suspend for five minutes and we'll come back to deal with this motion.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1550)

The Chair: Members of the committee, I made an error here in my handling of this meeting, and we're going to have to go back and fix that.

We shouldn't have elected vice-chairs today. That is done at the beginning of a session. Of course, the session starts when there's been a Speech from the Throne. Over the years it's been like that so often that in the 16 years I've been here, in my memory, it's always been the start of a new session when we've come back in the fall.

Really, all we should have done today is elect a chair. Some committees are electing vice-chairs too. We've done that and we can't go back on that, but the routine business that governs the committee—I've got the wrong term, but the rules, the routine proceedings, that govern the committee we decided at the start of the session. In fact, we shouldn't be dealing with that again unless the committee decides at some separate time to do that. If we're going to deal with any other business today at all, it will require unanimous consent to do so, including the motion that was brought forth.

Before we debate that motion, I have to put it to the committee, whether there's unanimous consent to deal with this issue, which wasn't on the agenda, which wasn't the appropriate business to come before this committee.

Mr. Regan, if you would like to ask for unanimous consent to deal with your motion, that's the appropriate way.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Sure, I'll ask for it, yes. That too should be fun.

• (1555)

The Chair: So we've had a request here for unanimous consent to deal with this motion. Is there unanimous consent?

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: There is not.

Is there any other business to come before this committee before I adjourn?

Mr. Regan.

Hon. Geoff Regan: That leaves the question of what we'd like to talk about and what we'd like the committee to work on this fall and whether there's unanimous consent to have that discussion.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent to deal with future business of the committee today?

Mr. David Anderson: No.

committee will be future business. We will get out a notice to that effect.

The Chair: There is no unanimous consent. We will come back on Wednesday, and on Wednesday I assume the business before the

The meeting is adjourned.

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