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Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

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EVIDENCE

Tuesday, March 9, 2010

—
Chair

Mr. Ed Fast

Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

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•(1105)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): Honourable members, good morning.

I see a quorum.

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

I am ready to receive motions to that effect. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party.

Are there motions?

Mr. Rathgeber.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): I'd like to nominate Mr. Ed Fast for the position of chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Rathgeber that Mr. Fast be elected as 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 Mr. Fast duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: I am now prepared to receive motions for first vice-chair.

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

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): I nominate Mr. Brian Murphy.

[English]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Madam Mendes that Mr. Murphy be elected as first 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 Mr. Murphy duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: I am now prepared to receive motions for second vice-chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

Monsieur Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): I nominate Mr. Serge Ménard.

The Clerk: Moved by Mr. Lemay that Mr. Ménard be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any other motions?

[English]

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

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Ménard duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

I now invite Mr. Fast to take the chair.

•(1110)

The Chair (Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC)): Thank you, Madam Clerk, for that.

Thank you to all of you for your ongoing confidence in my chairing of this committee. Also, congratulations to the two vice-chairs who were elected.

As I have said before, I feel this committee has worked very well, as collaboratively as possible, given the minority government circumstances. I hope that the decorum and spirit of collaboration will continue as we move forward, even when we disagree on some of the bills and studies that we undertake.

We welcome Ms. Mendes and Mr. Dechert to our committee. I think you will find it a very enjoyable experience, as it has been for me.

Madam Clerk, I understand there are a number of routine motions that would normally be adopted, but I believe that on Wednesday, March 3, the House of Commons adopted the following order, which I quote:

That, for all standing committees, routine motions in effect at the time of prorogation of the previous session be deemed to have been adopted in the current session, provided that committees be empowered to alter or rescind such motions as they deem appropriate.

Accordingly, the routine motions that were in effect at the time of prorogation are reinstated, and the clerk will reflect the House order in the minutes of this meeting. The committee can, if it chooses, amend any of these motions.

Finally, for information purposes, the clerk has distributed a copy of the motions to all committee members.

What is your wish? Are you satisfied with the routine motions as we had them in the previous session?

It appears we have agreement on that.

I want to raise a couple of other items as well. You may recall that in the previous session we were just on the verge of dealing with Scott Andrews' private member's bill, which was Bill C-464. Given the fact that we don't yet have any government legislation before us, I have taken the liberty of having the clerk contact Mr. Andrews, and he is available on March 16 to introduce his bill here at committee. Is that acceptable?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right.

The second item is this. We spent a lot of time on our organized crime study, and I think it would be a shame if we didn't move that evidence forward and continue on that one, as and when we have time at this committee. Is that something you want to pursue?

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): May I ask, as a point of clarification, what you mean by move it forward and consider it? Do you mean that there would be a draft already started, or do you think there'll be further evidence required? Or what do you mean exactly?

The Chair: I believe we still had a number of cities to visit. I think it would be a mistake not to visit those cities. Toronto, Winnipeg, and Edmonton, I believe, were on our schedule.

Mr. Brian Murphy: I agree.

The Chair: Because we've spent so much time on this, we should complete the study. If it is the wish of the committee to do so, all we need is a motion.

We have a draft motion for that. The motion would read as follows:

That the evidence heard and documentation received by this Committee in relation to its study on organized crime during the 2nd Session of the 40th Parliament, be taken into consideration by the Committee in this session.

When I'm referring to the organized crime study, I'm not referring to the one that deals with declaring criminal organizations; it's the other one.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): I will move that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Oui, Monsieur Ménard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): I do not believe that I am the only member here who did not participate in several of the sessions you held. So I would like to have a copy of the material that was produced, electronically if possible. I prefer having it on my computer because I can even refer to it when I am at my cottage, for example. It is also a way of saving paper.

[*English*]

The Chair: The clerk says that's certainly doable.

You'll provide that to him?

The Clerk: Yes.

The Chair: All right.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: I understand that even the evidence has already been transcribed and is available electronically.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Comartin.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): I would like to have a copy of that. It certainly would be a much more efficient way of dealing with the evidence as we move on and get to the point of giving directions and reviewing it. If we could have it electronically, that would be great.

I would suggest that if one is going to be produced for Mr. Ménard, we just have one sent to all members of the committee.

● (1115)

The Chair: I made the assumption that it would go to all of us electronically, especially since we have two new members. It will give them a speedy update on where we are on the study.

Is there anybody else?

Mr. Dechert.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): On another point, Mr. Chair, I just want—

The Chair: Before you proceed, we're in agreement that we'll move forward, and the motion will be deemed to have been passed to bring forward the evidence as read?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Dechert and then Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Bob Dechert: On another point, Mr. Chair, I just wanted to mention that I understand that the Minister of Justice may be available on March 23 to appear before this committee in regard to the supplementary estimates.

The Chair: That's correct.

We have supplementary estimates. We also have main estimates that have been referred to us, and the minister has indicated that he is available on March 23. I believe those supplementary estimates have to be back by the 26th.

There's a short timeline on that, so we're going to have to get the minister in here.

Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): I'll withdraw my comment. Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Comartin.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Back to the study on organized crime, is it appropriate that we initiate the motion to travel to those three communities today, or are you going to put it over to another day?

The Chair: It was actually on my to-do list as well. I just want to get some instructions so that the clerk can go ahead and start planning for those.

We're proposing to have a steering committee meeting on Thursday rather than a regular meeting, so we can put together a work plan going forward. Perhaps at that time we'll have some options for travel available to us.

Mr. Joe Comartin: That's fine.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Rathgeber.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Mr. Chair, we didn't vote on Mr. LeBlanc's motion.

The Chair: Actually, it was done by consent.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just to confirm, our new sitting time is Tuesday and Thursday between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Monsieur Lemay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I see that, according to the routine motions that were passed, lunch will be served between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. I do not mean today, but when we are sitting.

I mention this, Mr. Chair, because I would like to encourage you to be careful. We have already gone through this situation, actually. I sat on several committees that met between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. and, wouldn't you know it, between 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., all kinds of people suddenly took an interest in those committees. So I encourage you to be careful, Mr. Chair. It must be made very clear that meals are for committee members and designated assistants only. There could be one per party or one per member. I am not sure of the rules, but I have been in situations where two of your predecessors in the chair have had to call some members of the committee to order, on several occasions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Lemay, the clerk reminds me that even though there is a routine motion that provides the clerk of the committee with the authorization to make the necessary arrangements for meals, it's not automatic that meals will be provided. Are you requesting that we have meals for our meetings?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Yes, I am, Mr. Chair, but I draw your attention to the comment I made about how popular our committee becomes when meals are being served.

• (1120)

[*English*]

The Chair: I would be prepared to appoint you to act as security for those purposes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: No, Mr. Chair, I...

[*English*]

The Chair: Understood.

So the assumption will be that we have a meal available during our meeting. All right?

Ms. Mendes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: I suggest that they be served on this side of the room only, not over by the coffee table, so that the physical separation makes it really clear that they are for committee members only.

[*English*]

It's just a question of making it less available to the participants.

The Chair: Yes, that's fair comment.

Mr. Woodworth.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You've mentioned the possibility that the Thursday meeting would be devoted to the steering committee. I just wanted to confirm whether we can now assume that, and that non-steering committee members need not attend.

If you needed a motion to that effect, I'd certainly be prepared to move it.

The Chair: All right. You make that motion.

Is everyone in agreement with that motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right. A steering committee will be held on Thursday, which means that all the other members of the committee don't have to attend.

An hon. member: This Thursday?

The Chair: Yes, this Thursday we wouldn't have a full meeting, just steering committee.

Monsieur Petit.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to go back to the matter of the meals that are served while we are sitting. I have been through this with other committees. I, along with several of my colleagues, have noticed that people are moving around for almost an hour. We have to realize that, sometimes, witnesses come from some distance away. If I am having my lunch at the back of the room, for example, I cannot hear them and I cannot understand what is being said. We are being disturbed for almost three quarters of an hour, sometimes as much as an hour. I think that would obstruct our work on justice. When you call witnesses, it might perhaps be good if we could take a break for half an hour and then hear from the witnesses. When I was at the back of the room, there were several times when I could not hear the translation and had a hard time following. I think that this is important, out of respect for the witnesses.

Imagine if Mr. LeBlanc was asking a witness questions and all the Conservative members got up to get lunch. It would be disrespectful to the witnesses. We cannot do that. I would like you to find a solution. So my suggestion is that the committee and the witnesses break for half an hour. We could continue after that.

[*English*]

The Chair: We could spend a lot of time debating this.

I would be uncomfortable with breaking for that half-hour because we have only two hours available to us. I think we've had meals in the past. Other committees do the same thing. When we can, we fit it in. If you're asking questions of witnesses, obviously you're not going to go back there, but it does provide room for other members of the committee.

Let's deal with it as it comes along. If it does become disruptive, I'm prepared to reconsider it, but I think the normal practice has been that we just go back there whenever it suits us, fill our plates, and bring them back.

Is that acceptable to everyone?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: All right.

Monsieur Lemay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I will just add that it would be appropriate for the chair to make a comment at the beginning of the session, so that our guests know that a meal will be served. So it may well be that members will get up. But they will not be leaving to get something to eat, with the committee sitting until 1:00 p.m. I tried this with three other committees. It works very well.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll ask the clerk to remind me of that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there other comments? Is there anything else you want to discuss before we adjourn?

All right. We're adjourned.

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