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Chair

Mr. Chris Warkentin

Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC)): Seeing a quorum, I'm going to call this third meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to order.

Colleagues, we left off at the last meeting close to the conclusion of the routine motions. We had passed nine routine motions, and I believe it was the 10th routine motion that we had left to deliberate on and pass before completing the process. So, committee members, we'll proceed to that at this point in time. If committee members do have a motion with regards to the 10th motion, I'll guess we'll hear from them. The motion is with regards to the questioning of witnesses and the rounds involved in that process.

If anybody has suggestions with regards to the 10th routine motion, I'm sure the committee would love to hear from you.

Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Frankly, I was hoping to do that with the critics of the respective opposition parties, before I tabled anything. Is there any—

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Why don't you table what you would like and we'll address it.

Mr. Greg Rickford: I'd be happy to do that for the benefit of the members who are here.

The Chair: There is no motion on the table as of now.

If anybody at the table would like to move a motion relating to the questioning of witnesses, you can.

Mr. Rickford, the floor is yours.

• (1105)

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just finished distributing copies of the motion I am proposing. I'd like to table that motion. You have the numbering and language of the routine motion from the 40th Parliament, but it will not be the wording of my motion.

The Chair: So you're moving a motion.

Do you want to read that into the record, or are committee members satisfied seeing it in front of them?

Mr. Greg Rickford: I've distributed what we intend to table as the motion in respect of two aspects of the routine motion, specifically

the questioning of witnesses and the order of questions. There is a rationale at the bottom, which can also be used as the language.

For the clerk, to the extent that this motion survives the discussion and interventions by members of the committee, it doesn't have to be written out as such per the Standing Orders. There is a mechanism here to facilitate and simplify the language, but out of an abundance of caution and certainty, I have written out what the four rounds would look like.

The Chair: Ms. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): I just need to say that I've never been at a committee where the third party was not allowed any questions in the second round. I'm not sure where this comes from, but it doesn't sit well with me.

Whereas we had four parties then three parties, are we now only going to have two parties in the second round? Where does that come from?

The Chair: Mr. Rafferty.

Mr. John Rafferty: My experience has been that we don't usually get past the second round, unless someone is there for the whole period of time. So the questions for the third and fourth rounds are somewhat meaningless. I think we need to look at the first two rounds.

My experience has also been the same as my colleague's, that the last slot in the second round of questioning would be the third party's slot. But as far as I'm concerned it looks okay, aside from that.

The Chair: Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you, and thank you for that analysis, John.

I think a couple of points are relevant. This is consistent with the style and the form that has been set down in the Standing Orders for most of the other committees. It's based on a couple of simple rationales. One is that each committee member should have a full opportunity to question the witnesses and, under this form, that's exactly what happens. I might point out for the benefit of the official opposition and for the third party that, uniquely, the orders here in the first two rounds potentially allow all four of the official opposition committee members to speak in the first and second rounds.

Similarly, the third party, being in the first round with the larger allocation of minutes, takes a position. And you might notice there that this does not enable the government to have all their committee members speak in the first two rounds, since we have six members. We're only taking five positions.

So those are the rationales for that. I have provided the rationale in those regards at the bottom of the page.

Thank you.

The Chair: Seeing no additional speakers on my list, I think we'll

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I have to point out there's no Liberal in the fourth round either.

• (1110)

The Chair: Ms. Bennett, did you want to speak?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes. This is Parliament and to see the second round, particularly for witnesses, whether it's questioning the minister on estimates, or.... There are lots of times where I hope we will have the full meeting for one witness or one panel, because it's very difficult to do anything in an hour. It just seems unreasonable for there to be no third party in either the second or fourth round.

The Chair: Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I hope that as a matter of good faith, the member for the Liberal Party remembers that I have no intention of being unreasonable in this. As we discussed in our own private meeting, from time to time, there would be a certain openness to share time. We're not precluded from doing that from time to time. But first of all, there's the discretion of the chair throughout this.

The Chair: Ms. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We're not going to go back over this issue, but I think the parliamentary secretary never even used to sit on committees, let alone vote on committees. So this motion seems more than top down. The parliamentary secretary said to me that part of the rationale was to increase the third party's time to seven minutes in the first round, but when you read the way the previous routine motion was for item 10, the third party already had seven minutes in the opening round. So I'm not sure how keeping seven minutes in the first round and eliminating the third party from the second and fourth rounds can be viewed as fair.

The Chair: Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): I apologize for being late. I had a delegation of chiefs arrive at the last minute and had to be respectful.

I spoke with Mr. Rickford about this yesterday. I didn't see the detailed list but generally speaking, we're fine with this. This is certainly consistent with the committee I was on in the last Parliament. In fact, this is fairer because we were then allocated.... The agreement between the Liberals and the Conservatives was that we only got five minutes in the first round, and often there wasn't a third round, so we had five minutes in two hours. So I think in many ways this is fair, and I appreciate the deference of Mr. Rickford in agreeing to our going first. We support this.

The Chair: Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Just for the benefit of the critic, first of all, thank you for the consensus we were able to work out here. I do admit that I went a little overboard in laying out the third and fourth rounds just in case we have a scenario where we have two-hour witnesses.

I just want to point out to the critic that uniquely under this format, the official opposition in the first two rounds has an opportunity for each committee member to actually speak to a witness. The third party is identified as having a place in those first two rounds. We have six members on this side and not all six members will be able to participate in the first two rounds. So I feel comfortable with the rationale behind that and I have no further comments with respect to this.

The Chair: Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Depending on the witness that you have, my experience is that we often don't go beyond the first round, and we're lucky if we get to the second round. So I think that's fair. As for a fourth round, I wouldn't hold our breath.

The Chair: Having no additional speakers on the speaking list, I think we'll move to a vote.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I don't think you can have it by consensus. Consensus does not mean unanimity.

The Chair: Okay, I think then we're passing this on division.

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

The Chair: Committee members, we have now completed the routine motions and I do appreciate your efforts in getting through them.

For the committee members who are all here, my suggestion is that we move into a subcommittee at this point in time, if there's a willingness or a consensus to do that.

Mr. Rickford.

• (1115)

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Chair, thank you.

Before we move to subcommittee, there are two notices of motion that I think, if I'm not mistaken, should occupy a little bit more of the plenary business, or am I...?

The Chair: Yes. If members want to move their motions, they are free to do so at whatever point in time they feel there has been 48 hours' notice. There has been the 48 hours' notice on both of them, so committee members are free to move those at any point in time.

Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Is it the pleasure of the two committee members who tabled these motions that have lived for 48 hours to discuss them at this committee?

The Chair: That is completely in the bailiwick of those members. I think there's time if committee members do want to move their motion.

Mr. Clarke, the floor is yours.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I'll read the motion: That the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development consider a resolution to recognize the important contributions of Aboriginal men and women whose support was pivotal to the British Crown (and subsequently Canada) in the War of 1812; and that a report on the resolution be presented to the House for concurrence and unanimous consent.

Colleagues, last year I was speaking with the Dakota first nations chief and I got quite an education in regard to the formation of Canada and the first nations' contribution, especially the Dakota first nations from Saskatchewan. They participated quite significantly from 1812 to 1815.

In further discussions with other first nations communities from Ontario and Quebec, it was clear that first nations' contributions had been quite significant. I feel it's prudent to be inclusive of the first nations' contributions and the aboriginals and the Métis in the formation of Canada and their contributions to the War of 1812.

I should make sure that I'm very clear here: The war took place from 1812 to 1815 and many of the battles took place with the British troops that were already stationed here in Canada. The war officially ended in 1815 with the Treaty of Ghent being signed. So I'm just hoping today that with the consent of my colleagues, we can pass this motion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Rafferty.

Mr. John Rafferty: I have a question of semantics. For aboriginal men and women, I wonder if instead of “aboriginal”, might we say “first nations and Métis”?

It's simply a suggestion, Rob.

The Chair: Ms. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes, I think it's an excellent idea on paper. Whether you go to Amherstburg near Windsor, or these places, the War of 1812 display museum would fit in there.

I'd be concerned that there are not really the resources. If we pass this, I think we should also be pushing for there to be something during the year, with some sort of event or some resources to some of the museums that had particularly documented the important view of the first nations.

So I'd be more than happy to pass this, but I would also ask my colleagues if, between the department and the Department of Canadian Heritage, whether there would be an opportunity for us to push a little for some tangible celebration of their role as they're planning the ceremonies.

• (1120)

The Chair: Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I don't have any particular objection. In fact, I had a request from the filmmaker who was apparently working with first nations on a film honouring exactly this role. I probably should forward it to the parliamentary secretary to the minister, because he might be interested.

I have a hard time agreeing to a motion when I have no idea what the report says. I'd feel more comfortable if I could see what the report says that I'm going to give consent to.

The Chair: Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Thank you.

I appreciate the interventions of my colleagues across the table.

Ms. Linda Duncan: *[Inaudible—Editor]*...reporting the resolution.

Mr. Greg Rickford: I'll let my colleague, Rob, speak to that.

I'll simply talk to John's suggestion very briefly. It's an excellent point. We were sharing a grin here, simply because we had gone through the exercise of considering that language.

Speaking on behalf of the department, John, the interplay between Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and Canadian Heritage on this was that the roll-out from the government will use that language as a model of consistency and that it would be inclusive.

Mr. John Rafferty: Through the model of aboriginal consistency.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Yes, rather than the specificities of the thing.

So it has been discussed and I had said to my colleague here that, tabled as such, it would probably bring up this kind of discussion. I'm simply making a point that this was the term that was going to be used as part of the government's roll-out and that it's consistent with the renaming of the department.

The Chair: Mr. Clarke.

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

Thanks to my colleague, Dr. Bennett, for her question.

There has been a lot of thought and detail just in the forthcoming roll-out to be inclusive of first nations. There has been money set aside to aboriginals for their participation in the War of 1812. So from coast-to-coast-to-coast there is going to be allocated funding for their participation as well.

I hope I can answer your question in regard to the report. It is just the reporting of the resolution and then there is a report back to the House in regard to this resolution.

The Chair: Mr. Rafferty.

Mr. John Rafferty: I brought my point up because, of course, when you use the term “aboriginal” that also includes Inuit. It's important, particularly in the last couple of years—and I think Mr. Rickford would agree with me—that there's certainly been a lot of work by Métis across Canada to distinguish themselves as a separate aboriginal group. By saying “first nations and Métis”, I think we'll be doing Métis groups across Canada an honour, a service, in actually singling them out. I recognize that the department has been changed to Aboriginal Affairs, and I understand that.

We have to be cognizant of the fact that there are some groups who do not like the term “aboriginal”, so I think whenever we can distinguish the groups, in a resolution for example, we should make every effort to say, in this particular case, “first nations and “Métis”. Métis groups across Canada would appreciate that.

The Chair: The next speaker—

Mr. John Rafferty: If I could, the other thing is that when Canadians think of the word “aboriginal” and aboriginal groups, 99% of them do not include Métis in there. It's important to make that distinction.

The Chair: Ms. Duncan is next.

It was just brought forward that there is a possibility that Métis people were not involved in the War of 1812, so as a committee we may want to investigate that. The suggestion is that if that is to be adopted, there may be some desire by committee members just to solidify that in fact.

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Thank you.

I endorse Mr. Rafferty's recommendation 100%. I have heard from delegation after delegation of first nations of their absolute opposition to the change in the name of the department. For many, it is according to the arguments Mr. Rafferty has put forward. If they were sitting at this table, they would be making this argument even more adamantly than we might. It's perfectly appropriate that the department look into whether or not Métis were involved. If they weren't involved, it should simply say "first nations". It should not say "aboriginal", and I would echo that. Some prefer "indigenous", whatever. But they absolutely are opposed to this adoption of the term "aboriginal" because they feel it's blurring the lines on those who are under treaty and those who aren't, blurring the lines between who is first nation and who is Métis and who is Inuit.

For this to have unanimous consent and to be applauded by the first nations out there, I would strongly endorse what Mr. Rafferty has recommended. I think they will look upon it with much greater favour if it says "first nations"—and it should also say "Métis" if the Métis were engaged. If they weren't engaged, then so be it.

• (1125)

The Chair: Committee members I don't have any additional speakers. There is a motion. There has not been a formal amendment proposed, so I do leave it....

Mr. Clarke.

Mr. Rob Clarke: If we can, we can defer this. I have information from the department that the Métis were involved. If we can go back, get some clarification from the department, and then bring this forward again, is it possible to defer it?

Mr. John Rafferty: They were very active on northwestern Ontario.

The Chair: Yes, that is possible.

Ms. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: While you're there, it would be great if at some point the committee were apprised of what's being planned. Dates and an invitation would be nice, too.

The Chair: Okay. That will be tabled until some future date. We'll leave it to Mr. Clarke to bring it to our committee's attention, then move the motion.

On a point of order, Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: The point of order is along the lines of what Dr. Bennett raised. There was an event this summer at the Métis gathering for Batoche. I found it an incredible insult that the Métis representative from the New Democratic Party Aboriginal Commission was not invited, and neither was I, as the official opposition critic, to an event that occurred.

I'm raising this as a point of order because if we are going to agree to these kinds of events, I think—

The Chair: Ms. Duncan, I'm going to jump in here. It's not a point of order. If it's a point of future business, we can talk about it in that framework, but—

Ms. Linda Duncan: It goes to whether I'm going to support this resolution.

The Chair: It's not a point of order because it does not pertain to this committee or the proceedings of this committee.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Then I'll simply speak to the....

The Chair: You may have the floor, Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Okay. I'm speaking to it as a matter of the resolution.

The Chair: Let's back up. I do apologize.

Ms. Duncan, the motion has been withdrawn until it's brought forward again. If you want to speak in terms of future business, we do have time for that.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Okay, let's be fair. You heard Dr. Bennett on additional things that she would like done, and they are being considered. I am suggesting additional things to come back to the committee.

The Chair: Very well.

Ms. Linda Duncan: An additional thing that I would like to have come back to the committee is who will be invited to a commemorative event.

The Chair: Very good.

Are there any other points of order, or suggestions for future consideration? If not, we will move to subcommittee.

Ms. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You had asked about the motion, and I would just like to say that I will delay, and we'll see what happens during the work plan of the committee. I prefer that we develop work plans by consensus, not by motion. So I won't table mine until I see how things go in the steering committee.

The Chair: Very good. That is a good segue to adjournment.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I'd like to speak to that as well. I had a very good discussion with the parliamentary secretary on exactly this point. We both agreed that rather than continually debating and voting on motions for the agenda, we would not bring forward motions. Now I have two motions from the Conservatives. So I just want a little fair game.

Are we going to be doing our business by motions, or can people submit motions that are considered in the steering committee? How will we be doing our business?

• (1130)

The Chair: Ms. Duncan, just as a clarification for your purposes, I believe there has been only one motion brought forward by a Conservative member. The other motion was brought forward by a Liberal member.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I'm asking for the same. How are we going to proceed? Maybe we can discuss that at the steering committee.

The Chair: Very good.

The Chair: That's a perfect segue to adjournment.

Ms. Linda Duncan: But at some time there's a larger group that we need to—

This third meeting is adjourned.

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