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# **Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, September 25, 2012**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Pat Martin**



## Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Tuesday, September 25, 2012

• (0850)

[English]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard):** Honourable members of the committee, I now see a quorum.

Our first item of business today, as you know, is the election of a chair for this committee. Just as a reminder, pursuant to the Standing Orders, the chair must be a member of the official opposition.

I'm now ready to receive motions for the position of chair.

Mr. Wallace.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** I'll nominate Pat Martin from the New Democratic Party.

**The Clerk:** Are there any further motions?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** And he's to stay silent for the next six months.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

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

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare the motion carried and Mr. Pat Martin duly elected chair of this committee.

Congratulations.

Before inviting Mr. Martin to take the chair, if the committee wishes, we will now proceed to the election of the two vice-chairs.

We will begin with the first vice-chair.

[Translation]

I would like to remind you that, pursuant to the Standing Orders, the first vice-chair must be a member of the government party. I am now ready to receive your motions to that effect.

Mr. Gourde, go ahead.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** I nominate Mike Wallace for first vice-chair.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Gourde just nominated Mr. Wallace. Are there any further motions?

As there are no further motions, is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Clerk:** I declare Mr. Wallace duly elected first vice-chair of the committee. Congratulations.

[English]

The second vice-chair, as you know, must be a member of the opposition party other than the official opposition.

I'm now prepared to receive a motion for the second vice-chair.

Madame Duncan.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** I nominate John McCallum.

[Translation]

**The Clerk:** Ms. Duncan has nominated Mr. McCallum. Are there any other nominations?

[English]

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** There's not much choice, is there?

[Translation]

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

(Motion agreed to)

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

[English]

I now invite Mr. Martin to take the chair.

Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Thank you, Marc-Olivier. Nicely done.

I'd like to say thank you very much to my nominator and the committee for the confidence they have shown in re-electing me the chair of the government operations committee. I'm very grateful and will try to aspire to the confidence you have shown in me.

I'm very grateful as well that we continue to have our wonderful clerk, Marc-Olivier. I think he is the finest clerk in the House of Commons...accompanied by Marlene.

We like our clerk best, Marlene. You can understand.

I'm very glad to see the continuity of our wonderful analysts, Tina Lise and Lindsay.

Welcome back to both of you, and thank you for the service to our committee in the last session and continuing into this one.

I'll also welcome the only change we have. We agreed that continuity on the committee is a good thing given the nature of the work we deal with, but we would like to welcome a new committee member, Costas Menegakis.

Welcome, and thank you very much for agreeing to sit on the government operations committee.

Having said that, I think it would be useful to talk a little bit about not necessarily future business but what we accomplished in the last session. We only have one new member, but we have a new briefing book circulating, put together by Tina Lise and the Library of Parliament, which reminds us, I guess, of the mandate of the committee and the possibilities of this committee as one of the major financial oversight committees in Parliament. I know quite a bit of effort went into this book, and I think it would be useful, if the committee wishes, sometime early on in this session to revisit this in some detail and talk about just what our mandate is and, again, the depth and the reach of the committee.

I hope we have time prior to jumping into a whole new study. I would be interested in revisiting the work we did in the last session, especially since—I believe by October 18—we can look forward to a government response to the report from our study on estimates. I think we structured our study in such a way or made sure that we submitted our report in such a way that we would get a response early into the fall session.

Let me just say I'm very proud of the work we did last fall. I think that particular study, the government operations review of estimates, is probably the most significant piece of work that went on in that session, as far as committee study goes, considering the importance of the subject matter and the influence it may have in subsequent parliaments. I'm very proud of the work the committee did and also the tone that we adopted in making up our minds to take on something of substance and to do a thorough and comprehensive job of it.

Future historians will stumble across that report, and when your grandchildren are sitting on your knee saying, "Grandad, what did you do to make Canada transparent and accountable and strong?", you can point to that report with great pride, surely.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** That might be overstating things a little bit.

Seriously, we should pat ourselves on the back. That was good work by this committee, and the government response to it is sort of how we finish. I think that's the conclusion of the study, and that warrants our review and our comment at that time too.

The analysts have also put together a list for me here of some of the central agencies and departments that report to the committee. We could probably look at that in the context of studying the book.

I guess the first real order of business is to assess where we want to go as a committee.

Mike, do you want to...?

● (0855)

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Yes.

I had some discussion with Linda, and it was her understanding that there are some issues with the clerk for Thursday.

No? Okay.

**The Chair:** There are all kinds of rumours flying around. Somebody told me that we can't meet Thursdays because we have no clerks and all this stuff. I don't understand. I don't know where these rumours are coming from.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** If you're okay with it, we thought we would move that the subcommittee on agenda meet in the Thursday time slot and that we would put together the agenda—Linda just remembered that she can't make it now—for the fall. At this point, that would include the concept of a study on P3s that we would like to do. I just want to give you a heads-up. I don't know if it will circulate.

**The Chair:** What is it on?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** It's on P3s.

Ms. Duncan has submitted a couple of recommendations. One for sure that we are interested in on this side is about the energy efficiencies of buildings.

I think we have to discuss where we're going to go with the estimates process, and set some time aside, hopefully, for the response from the government to our report. That might take the fall, based on how many time slots we have. We have to look at it.

I'm moving that the subcommittee meet in the Thursday time slot and that we set the agenda for the rest of the fall and bring that back to the committee.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes? It is on the same issue? You do have a motion on the floor. Is this on the same subject?

**Hon. John McCallum:** I'm just responding to Mike's comment about meeting on Thursday, about what our agenda should be. Why don't we talk about that today since we're all here?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** In my view—and we can have a discussion on this—the committee I've been on that has worked the best over the six years since I've been here has been the finance committee. The subcommittee on agenda sets the agenda and then brings it back to the regular committee. If you want to let the others go and have a subcommittee on agenda this morning, I'm fine with that.

**Hon. John McCallum:** I guess my only point is that we're here. We have a meeting. If we do what you propose, are we just going to adjourn in five minutes?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Yes. Why? Do you have nothing else to do, John?

**Hon. John McCallum:** No, it's just a practical point.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Okay.

**Hon. John McCallum:** We might as well use the time we have today, it seems to me.

**The Chair:** Mike, you have a motion on the floor.

John has finished.

Linda Duncan.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** The compromise might be....

And you're right. In fact, I'm not here on Thursday. I'll have to be careful now that I know you can read my mind, Mike.

There's no reason why Denis couldn't sit in for me, but if we adjourn soon, maybe the steering committee could meet for the next half-hour. We may not be ready to proceed on Thursday, but at least we'll have some agreement. We can at least come back to the committee and talk about what we're recommending.

There's one thing I would add. I concur with the suggestion: I'd want to see more about what we're discussing in the P3s. I think that's an awful lot for the fall, if we do the energy efficiency and the P3s. For the other suggestion, before the summer John tabled a motion to do with one aspect of the PBO. I've discussed it with Mike and a few others. I haven't had a chance to talk with John yet. In view of the fact that our committee has actually recommended that there be a review of the PBO, it seems logical to me that this is the committee that should do that review. It also seems logical that the review proceed before the reappointment or appointment of a new PBO in the spring.

If possible, I would like all of those motions to be in the discussion of the steering committee, and we can figure out the timing and so forth. I'm certainly available. We should all be available. Why can't the steering committee meet right away?

• (0900)

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I'll amend my motion, if that's okay, to say that the steering committee meet immediately following this meeting, and we will report back on Thursday.

**The Chair:** All right, because it does seem that in the committee as a whole we're jumping into the subject matter of what might be discussed at a steering committee anyway.

I'm not being argumentative here, but I don't understand, really, the advantage to a steering committee meeting. You have to bring everything to the whole committee to be ratified anyway. Just while we're on the subject, why do you think the steering committee process works better than when the whole committee meets to discuss future business?

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** My experience, Mr. Chair, has been—not just here but elsewhere—that the more politicians you have around the table discussing it, the longer it takes to make a decision. It's as simple as that.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I was on a council of 17 that went to 7. It was much more efficient. I'm finding that when we have agenda debates with everybody on the committee, it just takes too long, and we end up with the same solution. I have members on this committee who aren't part of the steering committee. I'd rather have them doing more high-value work than sitting around here.

**The Chair:** I understand your point. Then do we want to revisit our process where what is decided at the steering committee...? If it still has to come back to the full committee for debate and

ratification, you can run into the exact same problems you're trying to avoid.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I would agree with you if we were doing things one-off, but I'm hoping—and it may not work—that we can have a sense of what we're going to do for the whole fall. Then it's done and we don't have to worry about it again. Well, there might be some minor mixes here and there with moving a meeting and that kind of thing, but at least in general.... I don't expect a steering committee on agenda every week or anything—just one to kind of set the tone or set the view.

**The Chair:** Can we speak, then, about the makeup of the steering committee before we go any further? As the chair, I'm not comfortable, obviously, representing the views of the NDP.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** As you'll recall, you were neutral, Chair, and then the NDP had two people. Isn't that right? The Liberals were represented. We had three. Isn't that right? No, we had four. Did we have four?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Yes, we had four.

**The Chair:** Which is getting darn close to the whole committee—that's what I'm getting at. We're only leaving out a couple of people. If you have two New Democrats, plus me, four of you, and John, it's....

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** We had a smaller one, but you guys complained.

**The Chair:** Well, I think I was the one who complained. I don't want to be arguing on behalf of the NDP when I'm trying to be an independent chair.

Go ahead, Kelly.

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If you look at our routine motions, which are in the binder, they talk about the composition of the subcommittee and it being composed of the chair, the two vice-chairs, and one additional member, to be designated by the whip. I think we included the parliamentary secretary on that committee and then one additional member, to be designated by the whip from the Conservative Party. So that is five people.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I agree with Mike's proposal.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** I don't know if we've all seen all of the things that could be on the agenda.

**The Chair:** Well, we should settle the composition of the steering committee before we agree on when that committee is going to meet, because it takes a committee as a whole to make any changes or amendments to the steering committee.

Linda.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I concur with what Mike is saying. There's the neutral chair, three Conservatives, two NDP, and one Liberal. Isn't that what you just said?

• (0905)

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** Yes, but I did the math wrong. We have a majority—I don't know if you know this—so we have a majority on committee too.

That would be three and three, and nothing would be decided. The chair doesn't vote.

**The Chair:** The clerk has just handed me the names of the members of the subcommittee and the composition as it stood before. It was Kelly, Linda, me, John, Peter Braid, and Mike. That gives the Conservatives three and the opposition two, with an independent chair. Is that agreeable to people? Okay.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I have one other issue. I'm happy with our proceeding to the steering committee right away, but I'm at a little bit of a disadvantage, because I had made available my motions on suggestions for what we will discuss. I haven't had a chance to talk to my colleagues about the suggestion of the P3. So I'm going to be at a bit of a disadvantage in agreeing or disagreeing to proceed with it so that we can discuss it.

Either we're going to do motions or we're not going to do motions. I've no problem with raising additional topics—that's good—but I'm going to be at a bit of a disadvantage, because I haven't been able to talk to my colleagues.

We'll just see how it goes.

**Mr. Mike Wallace:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** Well, hearing no further debate, there seems to be agreement that we will suspend this meeting and go in camera for a steering committee meeting. Of course, other MPs are allowed to observe the steering committee—they don't have to go home—but they will have no voice and no vote, I suppose, either way we look at it. Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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