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Monday, October 28, 2013

Chair

Mr. David Christopherson

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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• (1535)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Joann Garbig): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

We can now proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the official opposition. I'm ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Allen.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): I nominate David Christopherson.

The Clerk: It's been moved by Mr. Allen that David Christopherson be elected as chair of the committee.

[Translation]

Are there any other motions?

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

[English]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and David Christopherson duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: If the committee wishes, we will now proceed to the election of vice-chairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the government party. I'm now prepared to receive motions for first vice-chair.

Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): I'd like to nominate John Carmichael as first vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Shipley that Mr. Carmichael be elected as first vice-chair of the committee.

[Translation]

Are there any other motions?

[English]

No? Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

[Translation]

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried, and Mr. John Carmichael duly elected first of vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Aspin.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): I would like to nominate Scott Simms.

The Clerk: It's been moved by Mr. Aspin that Mr. Simms be elected as the second vice-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. Simms duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: I would now invite Mr. Christopherson to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP)): Thank you, colleagues, for your vote of confidence. It was just as if we'd had a real election.

My understanding is that there has been some discussion among the members, and the desire is that we would conclude at this point.

We have two options. We had to do what we just did, so we can either continue and use the time at hand or we can adjourn and land running at the next meeting. What I'm hearing is that it's likely that the vast majority of members are in favour of the latter, that they would prefer it. That's my understanding, but I'm open to a motion or to anyone else who would like to take the floor.

Mr. Albas, you have the floor, sir.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and congratulations from all of us who are going to be supporting you and my colleague Mr. Carmichael, as well as Mr. Simms.

I would like us to, as you said, hit the ground running at our next meeting. Maybe we could start with committee business and then start talking about some of the items that stem from that.

The Chair: Okay. Good.

Is there anybody else on this? No.

Before I do that, let me just take one moment. There has been a major change in the makeup of the committee and in the leadership of the committee. Daryl Kramp and Andrew Saxton have been on this committee for a long time. Daryl and I actually go back to 2004, when we first got here. That leaves Mr. Shipley now as the senior-most member on the government benches, followed by Mr. Aspin. Of course, we've now had Mr. Simms join, replacing Mr. Byrne.

One of the things I hope we'll get a chance to talk about at the next meeting is the culture of this committee. It is somewhat different from other committees, given that our responsibility is not policy; it's really not the politics of the day. We're a committee of accountability, and all of our work comes from what the Auditor General does. I can tell you that this committee is seen, even in an international context, as a leading committee doing the work of public accounts and being an effective committee. I'm not saying we don't have our political moments, but we still have the ability to get above our partisanship and deal with the issues the Auditor General is bringing to us.

If I may say so, Mr. Kramp was the one who would often say, both when we were in opposition and to his full credit also as a government member, that when the Auditor General finds there's something wrong and it's just plain wrong, it needs to be called that, and we need to focus on what are we going to do to make sure it doesn't happen again. The politics of all that can happen elsewhere, but we focus on the work of the Auditor General. Otherwise, colleagues—and I say this especially to the new members—the more partisan we are in our work, the more we're letting down Canadians, because they see the Auditor General as their friend on the Hill. They see the Auditor General's work as their check and balance. We do justice to that when we aren't being partisan.

The government is still going to do what it has to do in terms of defending the government, and the opposition is still going to attack. But there is a point at which it moves from being sort of fair game into just straight, pure partisan politics, with the cheap shots and everything else. Once we're there, in my view, and given the purpose of this committee, we are failing.

In other committees, when they're dealing with policies and initiatives, they have the built-in "this". Here our system asks all of us to get above that. It's not easy. It doesn't happen all the time, but if we can be there when we need to—and I just say this to the newer members—historically that's when we feel the best about ourselves. When we've done something, a really good piece of work in terms of governance, moving forward, and addressing issues the Auditor

General has raised, and we do it in a non-partisan way, then we really are making a difference and we as this committee are serving Canadians in the best way this committee was meant to serve Canadians, and that is as an oversight committee dealing with the issues of the Auditor General.

The only other thing I might mention is that we are very male-heavy on this committee.

Madam Ablonczy, are you a permanent member of this committee?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): It's sad, Chair, that I'm not—

The Chair: That's a shame.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: —because I'm very fond of males.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Diane Ablonczy: I'm only subbing in.

The Chair: Well, that's a shame, not just because of your gender, but because of what you would bring to the work we do.

Madam Clerk, it looks as though there's an awful lot riding on your shoulders to make sure it's looking good for the other half of the population. It's not very well represented here, and we might want to speak to our whips about that, because that's not the best thing.

I'll afford an opportunity for anybody who'd like to say something before we adjourn.

Mr. Simms, you have the floor, sir.

• (1540)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): I'll talk to my whip about the lack of representation, but it's a little awkward, because again, it's just me.

The Chair: I hear you.

Mr. Harris.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): I just want to say it's great to be part of this committee, and I look forward to engaging in all that work. Also, I'd like to congratulate Mr. Albas on his new post as the parliamentary secretary.

The Chair: Very good.

Is there anybody else?

Hearing no one, and unless there's any last-minute business that needs to be brought before us—and I'm not seeing any hands—then we'll deem the motion to have been moved and carried.

The meeting is adjourned.

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