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Tuesday, October 22, 2013

—
Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1105)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Marie-France Renaud): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

[English]

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions and cannot entertain points of order or participate in debate.

[Translation]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party.

[English]

I am ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thank you.

To all committee members, I've given extensive thought to this and considered the performance of our last chair, and after careful deliberation, along with the fact that one of our members has promised all committee members free access and free burgers at Wendy's, I thought it would be appropriate to nominate for the position of chair Mr. Joe Preston.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Lukiwski that Mr. Joe Preston be elected chair of the committee.

[Translation]

Are there any further motions?

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Don't we need someone to second the motion?

An hon. member: No.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Okay.

[English]

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Preston duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Before inviting Mr. Preston to take the chair, if the committee wishes, we will now proceed to the election of the vice-chairs.

[Translation]

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

I am now ready to receive motions for the election of the first vice-chair.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: It is my pleasure to nominate Alexandrine Latendresse.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Ms. Turmel that Alexandrine Latendresse be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

Are there any further motions?

[Translation]

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Ms. Latendresse duly elected first vice-chair of the committee *in absentia*.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

[Translation]

I am now ready to receive motions for the election of the second vice-chair.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Again after careful consideration, I would nominate Mr. Kevin Lamoureux.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Lukiwski that Mr. Lamoureux be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

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

(Motion agreed to)

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

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The clerk: I now invite Mr. Preston to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Thank you all. I welcome our new members to procedure and House affairs and thank the members visiting today for coming. Some of you are old friends of this committee. It is good to have you here. It will not run as efficiently as you just saw it run. This chair will sometimes run it a little differently.

We have a few things we must also do today. We have to adopt our routine motions, and we will have a quick discussion on committee rooms. Mr. Scott is not here today. He had talked to us about moving out of this room, or at least generally being elsewhere.

Then I have some news to share about committee business, if that's okay with the committee.

I don't think we'll be here all that long today, but just to be as thorough as we can, we want to move forward on the adoption of routine motions first. Can we work on what we already had? There may be some other motions from the floor too.

First of all, do we have to accept each of these individually?

On analyst services, that we take up the services of our analysts—

Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): On a point of order, are these in fact the same motions that we had last time, or are there any changes to what we adopted and were using when Parliament wrapped up? Are they the same?

The Chair: I would love it to be that, Mr. Reid, but I can't predict what the committee wants.

Mr. Scott Reid: No, the question is, are they, as written here, the same?

The Chair: Sorry—are they...?

Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: In that case, can I make a motion that we just adopt them all as a unit rather than reading through all of them?

The Chair: I will accept that motion if the committee agrees to it.

I have Mr. Reid's motion on the floor. Is there any discussion on it? I see none.

All those in favour of accepting these as they were, please indicate.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair : Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I actually did have another motion.

The Chair: Let's try it then. That one went pretty smoothly. Let's try again.

Mr. Scott Reid: I actually had my assistant prepare a bunch of sheets in both official languages, which were given to the clerk. They could be passed out.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Chair, I just have one question. I noticed you had a sign at the end of the table. I'm just wondering if you properly reported the cost of that to Elections Canada?

The Chair: Since it was not a country-wide election, I'm not sure Elections Canada is involved in this.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, the purpose of this motion, as is fairly obvious from looking at it, is to accommodate members on the committee, MPs, who are not a member of a party with recognized party status under our rules in the House of Commons—although I worded it a bit differently and talked about MPs who are not members of a caucus.

Anyway, the purpose is to allow them a greater role. I could just read it out loud so people could have a chance to look it over and think:

That, in relation to Orders of Reference from the House respecting Bills,

(a) the Clerk of the Committee shall, upon the Committee receiving such an Order of Reference, write to each Member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the Committee to invite those Members to file, in a letter to the Chair of the Committee, in both official languages, any amendments to the Bill, which is the subject of the said Order, which they would suggest that the Committee consider;

● (1110)

[Translation]

b) suggested amendments filed, pursuant to paragraph (a), at least 48 hours prior to the start of clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill to which the amendments relate shall be deemed to be proposed during the said consideration, provided that the Committee may, by motion, vary this deadline in respect of a given Bill; and

[English]

(c) during the clause-by-clause consideration of a Bill, the Chair shall allow a Member who filed suggested amendments, pursuant to paragraph (a), an opportunity to make brief representations in support of them.

The Chair: Excellent.

Mr. Reid has a motion on the floor.

Is there any discussion on it?

Madam Turmel, were you on my list, or was it Mr. Christopherson?

[Translation]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: This is about another motion.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Congratulations on your return to power, Mr. Chair. I wish you well in your reign.

I'm leaning favourably towards this. I think it has a lot of merit.

I'm just curious. Through you, Mr. Chair, if I may, Mr. Reid, are there precedents for this in the Commonwealth that you've drawn from?

Mr. Scott Reid: I don't know, to be honest. If your question is whether I have drawn on any, the answer is no. Whether there are precedents, I can't say.

Mr. David Christopherson: Here's the thing. I think it's a great idea. I mean obviously anything that empowers individual members of Parliament, particularly those who aren't in cabinet, is a move in the right direction given that right now the tide is taking us in the other direction.

I think this is a good idea. I do think, however, that we might want to take a little time just to think it through, to research whether it's been tried in the Commonwealth, whether it was successful, whether it failed, or whether they needed to make amendments.

It has implications, Mr. Chair, regarding the procedures of the committee in terms of the kind of workload that can officially be added.

Quite frankly my personal view—and I'm just subbing in—is that this should be looked at favourably. I won't move it, Mr. Chair, because I'm not a permanent member. I would recommend that the committee think about tabling it just to give everybody a chance to think it through. It's the first time we've seen it, and that would give everybody a chance to consider the implications.

At first blush I would just say congratulations to Mr. Reid for attempting to go against that tide in which individual members, quite frankly, have a diminishing role in the parliamentary process. This is an opportunity to beef that up, and it should be looked at favourably, but I would recommend that we just table it and give ourselves a chance to do a little bit of homework before we make a major change into a new arena.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Lamoureux, you're next.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): I appreciate the motion and what the government is suggesting that we might want to consider here.

Mr. Reid, I take it that part of this is to allow for members who might not otherwise have the opportunity to present at committee. It would then go to third reading or report stage and then they would propose amendments at that stage.

Is this so they wouldn't have that possible option? What's your reason or rationale for bringing it in at this point in time?

The Chair: I'll allow you to answer, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Let me try both of those at the same time. I was trying to make notes in order to be able to respond more fully, but my pen died on me.

To deal with Mr. Christopherson's question first, it's not people who are not members of cabinet, who have their own reasons for not actually being able to introduce motions, because cabinet acts as a single unit. Rather, it's people who are not members of a caucus. On this committee, as a practical matter, that would be a reference to Ms. May, for example. She's not a member of a caucus. I suppose there's a sense that she is a caucus. At any rate, that's who it's referring to. That's the very narrow meaning.

On the second point, regarding precedents elsewhere in the Commonwealth, I just don't know what there's been elsewhere.

Casting our collective minds back, we can all remember that this spring the finance committee actually made use of a similar procedure. To be honest, I don't have the exact wording of what they did. They had a somewhat similar procedure. That, in essence, if you like, is the precedent for this.

To answer Mr. Lamoureux's question, this is just a way of creating a system, a structure, or a rule that's available in advance for allowing greater integration of independent members. Obviously, it's not just Ms. May but also members of the Bloc Québécois who are sitting as independents right now. There are a number of other individuals who were elected under one party or another who are now sitting as independents who would also fall under this motion.

• (1115)

The Chair: You still have the floor, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Why wouldn't you make it more universal in the sense of any member of Parliament, with the possible exception of cabinet members or parliamentary secretaries? Even if you are part of a caucus, you may still have ideas. You might not be on the committee for whatever reasons, but you might have an idea that you would want....

Would you be open to allowing it to be more universal?

The Chair: You may respond.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

If a member feels that's the appropriate thing to do, they could try making an amendment and they would find out.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: If you're asking me to provide the amendment, I don't have it offhand. I would support this. I don't know what amendment would be appropriate. I look to the analysts or the clerk on how I would accomplish this so that it would be more universal instead of just independent members of the House of Commons.

The Chair: We're at two points here.

We have a suggestion to table the thing for another meeting. We now have a suggestion on an amendment.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's up to the committee to decide on any of those things. I put forward a motion. Obviously, what I support is the motion. Anybody who thinks the will of the committee might be otherwise ought to put forward a motion as and when appropriate to see what the will of the committee is.

The Chair: Since I'm having so much fun in the post-election party, Ms. May, our committee often has had independents at the meeting, but not often have they been allowed to participate. We will be talking about that later in this meeting as we move towards another study.

If you have a point on this, I'll certainly take it if it's short.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you.

There will be no other precedents anywhere in the Commonwealth, because the specific rule that relates to members in my position having the ability to put forward amendments at report stage emerged in this Parliament only in response to earlier action taken, when the Liberals were in the majority, to prevent Reform Party members from putting forth extensive amendments at report stage, such as occurred over the Nisga'a treaty.

As a result of that, this procedure in the Canadian Parliament is unique in the Commonwealth. My discovery of that rule and subsequent use of that rule is, with all due respect to all members, the entire reason that the finance committee, and subsequently other committees, took to the process of inviting me to present my amendments to committee for their ritual slaughter before committee.

I will participate when invited. I have to say that I don't regard it as an extension or improvement of the rights that I had, because I only get a minute per amendment. That seems to be the way it's being treated, so I can't really discuss my amendments, or defend them, or even accept friendly amendments when they're suggested.

But I am obviously not in the same position as the rest of you. I accept whatever rules there are, but in trying to answer the questions that have been put forward here, I will say that the only reason we have this anomaly in the Canadian House of Commons that gave people in my position somewhat special access to the report stage amendments was because of earlier action taken to restrict the ability of members to put forward amendments at report stage, which is unique to the Canadian system.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll take a couple of speakers, Mr. Julian first, and then we'll decide which route we're going with this.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and congratulations on your re-election.

I am a little concerned. I certainly understand Mr. Christopherson speaking very favourably to this, and I support the principle as well, but what I am sensing as this emerges is that what it actually does is cut off report stage amendments—

An hon. member: Yes.

Mr. Peter Julian: —which means that we're not talking about an improvement in participation for members, but actually a way of curtailing the kind of debate that often should be held in the House of Commons.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask the clerk of the committee to inform us either now or perhaps at a later meeting—I think it's clear that we probably have to put off adopting or voting on this today—if the impact of this motion would be that members like Ms. May and others would be precluded from presenting amendments at report stage.

The Chair: I'll allow you to answer. Or do you want to defer...?

She wants to do her homework.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, and if you don't have an answer, you could bring that back for the next meeting.

I think it's pretty clear. I don't think we shouldn't be pursuing this today, because that's an important question that I think we need to have answered.

The Chair: We'll get to that part in a minute.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate Mr. Reid's response. That's why you take time with these things.

I did misunderstand. I thought you were opening it up to everybody who's just not a formal member of any committee. When you say "not a member of a caucus", that obviously takes us right to where Mr. Julian is in terms of suggestions. Clearly, I would hope that at the very least there would be a tabling of the motion. We've already asked for an important piece of information, and the clerk said she needs to do a little research. That speaks to the complexity of this.

Any time it's complex procedurally, it's automatically complex politically, or it can be, so I appreciate Mr. Reid clarifying that for me. That does change the nature of it. I would just hope that a motion to table would be adopted to give all of us time to reflect on it and be clear on where we are.

If you would accept it from me, Chair, I would move that this matter be tabled until the next meeting.

The Chair: I think I have to accept that if you ask for it.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, I do.

The Chair: We could ask the group whether that's what they would like to do.

Mr. Reid?

The clerk tells me that this is not debatable. All right. I always like a good debate, though.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: All those in favour of the motion to table? Opposed? (Motion negated)

The Chair: Well, I would say we're not tabling—

An hon. member: Really?

An hon. member: Just ram this through...?

An hon. member: I would say that it's a tie, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Well, I did see that Mr. MacKenzie, being the ancient person that he is, was slow in his hand, but he did get it there. He and I are good friends, so he doesn't...

I mean, I could do it again if you'd like, but I think—

Mr. David Christopherson: Could we have a recorded vote, Chair? I'm rather taken aback. I mean, really, is that what this is going to be? Steamroller it through...? Come on.

The Chair: Since we've already had the vote not to table and we know the outcome of it, calling for a recorded vote now is kind of after the fact, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I was going to ask, Mr. Chair, if the government is in fact open to the amendment that would allow all members the opportunity that independent members are being provided.

The Chair: Are there any further speakers on this one?

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, I'm a little perplexed. Mr. Christopherson asked quite reasonably for tabling of a motion. We don't have answers to the questions we've just asked. Mr. Reid was unable to answer. The clerk has asked for a couple of days. I'm very surprised that when a motion is brought forward and questions are raised, the government doesn't have an answer, and when the clerk very responsibly asks for time to get those answers, the government majority then decides they're not going to accept tabling.

It's a very strange precedent. I'm new to the committee, but I'm very perplexed. I thought Mr. Reid had presented this in good faith. We've now found, after a couple of rounds of questions, by Mr. Christopherson, Mr. Lamoureux, and Ms. May, that there are some real concerns about this. What this could indeed do is limit the parliamentary privileges of independent and non-recognized party members. If that is the case, if the goal is to limit, I'm quite concerned about the direction of the government. If the government is presenting this in good faith, which I hope is the case, then the government needs to support the idea of getting the information that members have just asked for.

I really don't understand why government members would oppose tabling when we've just heard from the clerk that we need a couple of days to get further information.

Mr. Chair, I have to question the real intent of the motion. If the intent is to further members' participation, which we all welcome, then that's something that I think we could all support, as Mr. Christopherson clearly indicated. That's fine, but we obviously need some more information, and we need to consider this at the next meeting.

If the intent is to try to ram this through, then I suspect the intention is very much to limit the participation of members like Ms. May. If what the government is attempting to do is limit the participation of non-recognized parties and independents, then I have real concerns. I couldn't support this motion if that's the intent.

It's very unclear. We have Mr. Reid explaining it one way and then the government voting another way. Please let us take the time to get the information that members need so that we can then have a fulsome debate and make a decision.

•(1125)

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Lukiwski next, and then Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thanks.

This is actually in response to Kevin's question, or a general question, and David first raised it, as to why not open it up to every member. I'll give you my interpretation; I won't speak on behalf of Scott, because he was the one who drafted the motion. As we all know, if you are a member of a recognized party, in other words you

have a legitimate caucus, you can sub in membership at any time. In other words, if a member of the NDP or the Liberals wanted to make an amendment on a specific bill at a specific committee, they'd merely have to sub themselves in and present it, but the independents don't have that ability.

I see this as being specific to those members who aren't in a recognized party because they do not have the ability just to come and vote and participate in a meeting, as every other member of a recognized party does.

So when you say "open it up", in effect it is opened up to every member except the independents, as we stand right now, because we all have the ability to do exactly what the independents don't have the ability to do.

An hon. member: Well, not really.

The Chair: Let's try to bring this one.... Is it a motion that we need to have finished today? We have other business that must be accomplished.

Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I appreciate what you're saying, but keep in mind that when you sit in a committee, and I will use the Liberal Party as an example, often a critic will be there, and you might have any one of 30-plus other members who would like to see some changes to the legislation, but we only have one spot on the committee. It can create, even within the whip's office, some difficulty with regard to doing the proper scheduling, the swapping in and out type of thing. More important, I would argue, is the fact that if we're saying to certain members of Parliament that there is something that is going to allow them the opportunity to come before the committee to express a possible amendment, that is something that should be universal to all members.

Some members might be challenged even to get their names onto a committee list in order to present an amendment. What I was going to do, Mr. Chair, was propose an amendment to (a), which would read as follows—

The Chair: Just give me a second until the clerk—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: It's actually very simple. You can just follow along and it will make sense.

The Chair: I would like the clerk at the table.

•(1130)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Absolutely. I can appreciate that.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: It would read, "(a) The Clerk of the Committee shall, upon the committee's receiving such an order of reference, write to each member", and then I would cross out "who is" and replace that with "of the House who is not a member of", and then cross out "a caucus represented on" and replace the word "to" with the word "and". Then it would continue on as printed.

That would afford any member of the House of Commons what we're affording a handful of independents.

The Chair: Okay, I have an amendment.

Mr. Reid, I'll let you—

Mr. Scott Reid: Before we have any further discussion, could we ask the clerk to read it as she understands the new wording.

The Chair: We can do that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Then we'll make sure it's what Mr. Lamoureux actually meant.

The Chair: Then we will be discussing the amended motion.

Go ahead, please.

The Clerk: Paragraph (a) would read, "the Clerk of the Committee shall, upon the Committee receiving such an Order of Reference, write to each Member of the House who is not a member of the committee and invite those members to file...", and the rest is the same.

The Chair: Was that your intent, Mr. Lamoureux? Was that correct?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

On the amended motion now, I have speakers from the previous... and I will ask them, but first, Mr. Cullen, did you want to be first on this piece?

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Sure.

I understand Mr. Lamoureux's intention here. What's going to be challenging either on the amendment or the main motion is that committee members, at the current pacing of this, are going to be asked to vote on something they don't understand the implications of.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: What's passing strange for me is that I'm trying to understand the urgency of this having to be done this morning. This isn't, as you mentioned, Chair, a routine motion. There's nothing routine about this. This is new. It is a new way for the House to do its business, which is fine. We always look for new ideas to make the place work better, but for committee members to sit here and pretend that they understand what the implications are, having not heard from people who might understand what the implications are is hubris and dangerous, because this place is filled with unintended consequences.

While I appreciate what Mr. Lamoureux is trying to do here to improve the motion as it is, we still don't yet know what the implications would be of either the old motion or the one for which there is now an attempt to amend. To then go ahead and vote on it seems stupid. It doesn't seem like a good use of committee business.

My intention and understanding of the committee's coming together today was to do a lot of the routine motions that we were trying to carry out, so that we could get into the study on how the House conducts itself with respect to MPs' expenses, for example. I know that's where you want to get to, Chair.

The Chair: It's really what I want us to do.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's too bad we are into this conversation, with the pressure also of saying that we have to vote on it now without understanding what it's going to mean.

This is a bad start for the committee in this new session if this is how we are going to conduct ourselves with the responsibility that we bear to all members of Parliament, regardless of whether they're independent or with the major parties.

The amendment is interesting, but it's impossible for me to vote on this not knowing what the vote is going to mean. I'm not comfortable doing that, and I don't suspect anybody else should be comfortable with that particular suggestion.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Christopherson next.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair. I won't be long because my comments are very similar to Mr. Cullen's.

As you know, Mr. Chair, in the past I've spent a lot of hours here working on some pretty important files. We've all gotten to know each other fairly well on a personal basis, with excellent relationships.

Mr. Reid, in my opinion, comes to this committee with an excellent reputation: he doesn't play games and often has a bit of an independent streak. If something is right, even if his party is a little offside.... We all respect when that's done, especially when it's done cleverly and allows one to survive within a caucus and still make it. I have to tell you that in my view either Mr. Reid is consistent with who he is and the role he's played and the ideas he brings before this committee...in which case it would seem to me to be reasonable to respect the other members of this committee and at least give them a chance to understand the implications of a significant change to our law-making procedure.

We've already had the clerk say, "I can't answer one of the key questions the official opposition has asked; I need to do a little research". Given the fact that Mr. Cullen has pointed out there's no timeframe, there's nothing pressing on us to do this right now, *maintenant*, then one is left with only one conclusion. If they're not prepared to table the motion and allow some reflection and careful thought, then it would seem to me that what Mr. Reid is doing, which would shock me, is that he's just being a stalking horse for the government; that this is a key strategic move by the government and that they're prepared to ram it through and take whatever hit there is, because they think the benefit of making the change outweighs the negative of taking the hit for being so undemocratic in the process.

So in my view it's one or the other. Either Mr. Reid truly wants some reflection and thought put into changing the way we make laws and the role that members of Parliament play in that, or he's just a stalking horse on behalf of the government and quietly trying to bring in a key strategic bomb. Then, to mix my metaphors, they are prepared to come in here and just steamroller the whole thing through. There is nothing democratic about that. There's nothing even respectful about that, I say with respect, to you, Chair.

Our caucus is left with one of two things. Either the government truly wants this to be looked at as a potential improvement in the way we make laws in our country, or this is the opening gambit of the government's approach to this session of Parliament, and they're going to steamroller this through and it will be the tyranny of the majority and the minority will just be left on their own.

•(1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. Julian, I am starting to hear a bit of repetition, but give it your best shot.

Mr. Peter Julian: Actually, Mr. Chair, I have to profoundly disagree with you on that. I'm going to start with a question and then I would like to make comments after that.

My question through you to the clerk is, what impact on report stage amendments in the House will Mr. Lamoureux's amendment have? If the clerk is unable to respond now, could she let us know if she'd be able to get the information and bring it back on Thursday.

The Clerk: This has been discussed a lot in the last few years. I know there have been decisions on this, so I want to make sure that I come back with the right information.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much.

I thank the clerk, Mr. Chair, through you. We have a number of questions that we put forward that need answers. If the government is in good faith on this, and I'm assuming that Mr. Reid is, I think there will be another opportunity for the government to do the right thing. That's important.

That means allowing the clerk time to get the answers to the questions that we have now asked. If we don't have the answers—and Mr. Reid clearly does not have the answer—then it's clear that this has not been fully thought through. As a committee we have a responsibility to look at what the implications are, to hear back from our clerk and to hear back from the House, and thus to get the information. It's not rocket science. Anything that has a profound impact on House procedures has to be considered very carefully. So I presume that the members on the government side will do the right thing and table this so that we can simply have the discussion when we have the information.

The Chair: Madam Turmel.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Mr. Chair, given the amendment that has been proposed, I would like to know whether postponing the discussion on that topic to Thursday is consistent with the rules.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's always up to the will of the committee. We have a motion on the floor that has been amended. Once that happens we tend to finish that process.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Yes, I can understand that, Mr. Chair, but new elements have been added. New questions are being asked. The clerk or the appropriate person cannot answer without obtaining the required information first. As I was saying, an amendment has been proposed. I think it would be fair and equitable for the whole House if we had some information before voting. We are talking about Thursday. We don't want to cause indefinite delays. If we proceed in this manner, we will have an opportunity to clarify the issue. In addition, Mr. Reid could obtain information about the intent and get back to us. You could answer our questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski, did I see your hand?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes. I want to go back to my original comments to Kevin.

I appreciate the amendment you put forward, Kevin, but I don't think the motion as written pre-amendment would be as unwieldy or difficult even for a small caucus like the Liberals, inasmuch as we have seen before at this committee—and I'm sure at others where the Liberals may have only one member on the committee—that if there's a particular subject being discussed, they always have one of their critics or some other member sub in.

With respect to making amendments on any bill, I still think you have the ability with only one member on this committee. If you're discussing bills in your caucus before they're debated, as I'm sure you do, as I'm sure the NDP does, and as we certainly do, that's normal practice. As you know, from a House leader's perspective, we always want to make sure that the opposition parties are made aware of bills that are going to be introduced and when they're going to be introduced for debate, so that you have an opportunity at caucus to discuss those bills and formulate a bit of a strategy or a response. Then we go into debate. That hasn't changed.

Given that, any time a government bill is going to be introduced, your caucus would have I believe ample opportunity to decide whether you want to support it, amend it, or whatever. If a member of your caucus says they think they'd like to make an amendment on a particular bill because... Whatever it is, they can funnel that through you, and you can present it on their behalf at this committee or any other committee at the appropriate time, or that particular member can sub himself in. If you have more than one member of your caucus and you only have one member on a particular committee, they can still get that information and the amendments to the person who does sit on the committee.

Similarly with the NDP, they have four members represented on this committee, and I'm sure that if they have amendments to specific bills that they want to bring forward to other committees, they can certainly sub their members in. While I appreciate what you're saying in that you want to make it available to all members, I think that right now members of Parliament, other than the independent members, do have that ability.

Again, I go back to what I know is a process of all parties. It's that you will debate government legislation as your own caucus, right? That's why we give you notice of when a particular bill is going to be introduced. When you have your Wednesday morning caucus meetings, your critic, probably... I don't know how you deal with it procedurally, but that particular government bill will be introduced, I'm sure, at your caucus. Someone will give a recap of the intent and an analysis of what your critic or leadership feels about the bill. They will ask for caucus comments and then probably make a recommendation that as a caucus you're going to support the bill or oppose the bill.

I would also point out, particularly with respect to the NDP, something that I quite frankly admire from a discipline standpoint. It seems that whenever you take a position, whether it be for or against, your members vote 100% that way. From time to time in our caucus, even though we're being accused of being driven from the top down or are told that we don't have a voice of our own, many times our members vote one way or another way, and we have split votes on our side. I've never seen that happen with the NDP. As I say, I admire the discipline.

What I'm saying is that whatever your position is as a caucus it will be represented at every standing committee that we have here. I don't see the difficulty in getting your individual members' viewpoints, because it will be a caucus viewpoint. It's been proven to be that way ever since you've been elected, since 2011. You speak with a single voice.

It would be a little different if you had a caucus whose members, as you say, truly had independent minds and would bring their opinions forward. Then there might be a bit of a disconnect from government policy or caucus policy. But you guys don't. I can see a bit of difficulty with the Liberals just because of the sheer fact that they have fewer members—

Ms. Elizabeth May: It was the case in my caucus this year.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes. The Green Party always seems to speak with one mind as well.

That's my point, Kevin. It's just that I think every committee would have the ability, with the motion as written, to allow their individual members a chance to bring amendments. The only people it disenfranchises are the independents. That's why, I believe, Scott wrote the motion the way he did.

• (1140)

The Chair: We're still on the amended motion.

Madam Turmel, you had asked to come back onto the list so I'll let you go next.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Based on the information, I propose that the amended motion be filed, so that the clerk can provide us with answers to our questions later on.

An hon. member: That's a reasonable suggestion.

[*English*]

The Chair: That motion—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: I call for a recorded division.

[*English*]

The Chair: —has already been voted on and defeated.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: No.

Mr. David Christopherson: No, there was an amendment, Chair.

Ms. Nycole Turmel: I said amended motion. I didn't say motion.

The Chair: Just one second....

Could I have your bit again?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: I propose that the amended motion be filed, so that the clerk can answer the questions raised by the committee at a later date. I also call for a recorded division.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think the problem we're having is with the conditions on why we're tabling. So you may move a motion to table the amended motion apparently, but you can't put conditions on it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel: Then I propose that the amended motion be filed.

I would also like to call for a recorded division.

[*English*]

The Chair: Apparently it's not debatable. I learned that the last time.

Mr. Scott Reid: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I don't think this motion is in order.

Truly, Peter, you haven't heard my argument yet, so I might not convince you, but I might.

I think it would be in order if it were a motion to table.... I'm not really sure. We're discussing the amendment so it's hard to vote to table the motion as amended, because the amendment itself hasn't gone through, so the motion as amended does not yet exist. It's merely a proposal. I don't see how you can table something that is not yet actually done. That's my concern.

The Chair: The motion is to adjourn the debate.

Mr. Scott Reid: Oh, I'm sorry. I misunderstood. It's just to adjourn the debate? Okay.

The Chair: I'm okay with it that way.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right.

The Chair: Since there's no debate on that....

Do you have a point of order too, Mr. Lamoureux?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: No, I thought you just said there's no debate on it. Does that mean...?

The Chair: I mean on the tabling.

All those in favour of tabling?

Some hon. members: Could we have a recorded vote?

The Chair: Well why don't we do it that way then, because we have all the time.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: So we are still on debate of the amended motion.

I have Mr. Julian next, on the amendment.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, again through you, I'd like to consult the clerk regarding adding an amendment that would assure independent members that this does not in any way impact their report-stage rights that exist now.

I'd like to work through you, Mr. Chair, with the clerk to get wording that would clearly indicate to House members that this in no way—

[*Translation*]

—and that of course also applies to the Speaker of the House of Commons—affects the current rights of independent members at report stage.

[*English*]

The Chair: So you are looking to make a subamendment on the amendment? We are on the amendment at the moment, Mr. Julian, and you're trying to go further than that. So you are looking to make a subamendment?

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm signalling this through you, Mr. Chair, to the clerk so that she can perhaps develop language while we're debating the current amendment.

The Chair: I'll give her the freedom to look at it.

Go ahead. I take it this is a point of order, Mr. Reid, because I have others on the list.

Mr. Scott Reid: While members no doubt have very time-consuming thoughts they want to bring forward and it's their right to do so, I just think in this particular case it's out of order to introduce, in the middle of a debate on one subject, drafting instructions to the clerk as part of the debate. If that is to be done it should be done privately and not as part of the debate.

• (1150)

The Chair: I recognize what you're saying. We'll certainly be careful that the clerk helps me with what we're already working on before she continues to work on something new.

Mr. Lamoureux, you are next on the speaking list on the amended motion.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, again I want to respond to Tom's comments. When I moved the amendment, it was an attempt to ensure that there would be opportunities for all members to be treated equally in a process that I think is very important. If we're saying to some members of the House that we want them to provide amendments, or be afforded the opportunity to be provided amendments at the committee stage, I really do believe that it would be a mistake for us not to acknowledge all members of the House not having that same opportunity.

If you want to look at it, for every bill that comes before the House of Commons, an independent member could say, "Well, I would like to give an amendment on these eight or nine bills after going through them". You're denying that same opportunity to members who happen to belong to a caucus. You can say, "Well, you can go through your caucus infrastructure", but quite frankly I think that you would get members from all political parties who would say that it is still not fair, it won't work.

At least it's the principle that we're talking about here. Whether or not party members choose to use that, or some individual members who belong to caucuses choose to use it, is completely up to them. They might prefer to go through the caucus infrastructure, if I could put it that way.

I just don't believe fundamentally, in principle, that we should be singling out a half-dozen, or ten, or whatever that number of independents is, and saying, "Look you have the right to introduce amendments," when in fact there are others who do not have that right. I can recall a speech that was given inside the House by a member who indicated very clearly that he had been punished and told that he would not be able to issue any sort of statement going forward.

It would be great to have this discussion after we've all been afforded the opportunity to have some dialogue with some of our caucus members or other members, to even to reflect on it, to talk with the clerk's office, or get a better understanding of the eventual outcome of a rule change of this nature. That would be wonderful. If we're not going to be given that opportunity, I do believe that in order to make this a better, more universal rule that the motion itself, or the amendment that I'm suggesting, is worth supporting.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Cullen, Mr. Christopherson, and Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Chair, I shared your hopes and expectations after your successful election win, although it did sound like "Well, that pitcher has a no-hitter going into the ninth inning" sort of comment, where you worry about what the consequences could be, because here we are. I hope you can appreciate our reluctance, and in fact frustration, about getting a motion that has implications for all members of Parliament.

There are two things we haven't heard yet from the government. I listened to Tom, and I listened to Scott as well, very carefully. We raised two concerns. One is on the implications and whether we understand them—and we don't. No one on the Conservative side does, even though they seem to be willing to vote for something they don't understand, which is curious. The second is that there was a question about urgency. Why the panic, right now, today? That hasn't been answered at all in either Tom's or Scott's questions.

My colleague, Mr. Christopherson, made some comments with regard to Mr. Reid's reputation. I share those feelings, just with respect to Scott's tendency to seek the proper ground, and for sustaining a parliament that works and works for everybody, and from my experience is extremely evidence-based—in looking at other Commonwealth countries, in looking at other experiences, and understanding the impacts of everything we do. He's very consistent, and I quite admire him for that.

This runs completely counter to that experience for me.

We had intended to introduce a motion today talking about in camera meetings, with some rules so that MPs couldn't stuff themselves in camera and away from the public if they just didn't like the conversation. They are rules that guide school boards and municipalities, for goodness' sake. You'd think they could help us here at the House of Commons.

This is my comment on this motion and the amendments we are talking about. It is more than ironic—I would use the term “cynical”—that in the effort to talk about greater accountability and transparency, to improve democracy, the government is choosing a path that seems to run exactly counter to democratic values, in saying that we're going to push a motion through without evidence and in a rush, with no argument or reason for it, out of the blue.

While my expectations were like yours, Chair, coming into this meeting today, to get through some routine proceedings, it is impossible in good conscience for members of this committee to vote for a motion when they don't understand the implications. While my friend Mr. Lamoureux has attempted to improve this on the fly, which is always a noble effort, it remains true that we still don't actually understand the implications of even the amended motion. We have asked the clerk twice if we can have an understanding of how this would change the way we do business, how this relates to the two rulings of the Speaker that we had last session. We have no evidence of that. It seems the height of arrogance to suggest that without that information committee members can divine what this is going to mean for the House of Commons and for the health of our democracy, which, as we can all freely admit, has been under some duress for the last number of months and years. To go out to the public and say we are improving things, without evidence, without knowledge, and in a rush, to say that this is the right way to do things seems like more than playing with fire.

I go back to Mr. Christopherson's comment, that it begs the question about what the intention was of all this.

To be fair, Chair, both to the original motion from Mr. Reid and to the amendment from Mr. Lamoureux, I took them on good faith. I thought, well, okay, what does this mean? Does this help our work in the House? Does it help our work at committees, as committee members, because we're trying to improve legislation all the time and trying to make the House work better? Particularly for members who don't have the advantage of a recognized official party in the House of Commons, how do we counterbalance the effects of that?

It's an increasing number, by the way, particularly as MPs leave caucuses and join the growing independence movement, either by choice or by being forced.

The suggestion that committee members around this table will be able to go back to their constituents and say “I always vote with my conscience and I always vote with full information made available to me” is simply not true here.

I look forward to comments from Conservatives.

We have asked two very specific questions. In defence of the motion that Mr. Reid moved today, one very specific question is, what is the rush? Why are we so determined not to hear the evidence from the House of Commons? How can committee members even pretend that they're doing their jobs as members of Parliament when they're voting on things they don't understand at all?

• (1155)

Secondly, what evidence do we have to this point to suggest that this is an improvement? Do members of the government somehow

suggest they know more than the Speaker of the House and the able people who assist him in figuring out the rules of the House of Commons? I look to them for the governance of this place, for recommendations and suggestions. We've heard none from the government, only their suppositions.

If we were expecting a good start to this session, as I was, Mr. Chair, and some effort towards building greater democratic institutions within our Parliament, which is the motion that we were suggesting today about changing in camera rules and the study we're trying to conduct on the way MPs spend money, those were the two things we were meant to be looking at today. Instead we have a motion that government members themselves don't understand, and now it's being suggested that there's somehow a panic button that has been pressed and that we need to decide this today or else bad things will happen.

Like what? What happens between now and Thursday that's so grave for the government? One is only left to make suppositions because we hear nothing but silence or distractions about whether sitting caucuses can bring amendments or not, and how the whip works. I would be very careful if I were the government to suggest that their members are seized with democratic intent and are able to freely speak in the House of Commons, when we know that's absolutely not the case. So be careful with the sanctimony about who has an overwrought sense of discipline in the House of Commons, when Mr. Warawa and others have attempted to do such radical things as speak for 60 seconds in the House on something they want to talk about. Let's be careful.

So with regards to the amendment, again to my friend Mr. Lamoureux, it's interesting and maybe it improves this motion, but we don't know the actual intent or effect of this motion. To suggest that we simply can't wait 48 hours until we deliberate and then vote on it as members of Parliament is ridiculous and insulting.

I can only question what the intention of this is. I have the highest regard for Mr. Reid and the work he does at this committee. This certainly would diminish that, for whatever that's worth, because if the intention is to improve the place, then certainly waiting 48 hours at a minimum doesn't cause any of us any harm. It would let us all sleep a little better not having voted blindly on things, which should be a practice all MPs should resist regardless of political orientation.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Christopherson, you're next.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

I can't express how really disappointed I am. We know who the government is. We know who has the numbers. Quite frankly this is supposed to be the grown-up committee. When the House and the Speaker finds themselves in one heck of a mess and things need to be unpackaged, thought through, and given serious reflection, they send it to this committee. There's a reason for that, because the rest of us in the House look to this committee to play that role.

At the end of the day, whatever the government wants to do, the government is going to be able to do because it has the numbers. But the name of this committee is the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This is about procedure.

Mr. Chair, I'm really getting angrier by the moment as I think not so much about the substance at this point, but the process and the procedure and how undemocratic this is. I'm not going to dwell on this, but will say it once more just to get it off my chest, that clearly Mr. Reid is playing the role of a stalking horse for the government on this. I'm really disappointed that it would be him, or anybody at all, but particularly him personally. I have to believe that at the end of this he is going to reflect on this and ask if it were really worth spending some of his political capital on, some of his hard-earned reputation. But that remains to be seen and that's not the focus here, and I shan't refer to it again unless I feel I need to. Since I have lots of time, you never know.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: Settle in, we're going to be here a while. You're going to hear it again and again.

The fact of the matter is that this is about the procedure of law-making. This isn't about a ten percenter that was sent into somebody's riding. As important as that is, this is not that. This is not some one-off little thing that happened in the House, or a little procedural matter that we just need to straighten out a bit and everything will be fine. This is serious stuff. This is the law-making procedure of a G-7 country. It doesn't get much bigger than that, and all we're asking for as the opposition parties is an opportunity to table this for two days to allow us an opportunity to get answers to very valid questions about the implications both for the procedure of law-making in Canada, and also the rights of individual members of Parliament. That's how serious this is.

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm hearing an awful lot of noise from the government side and I think it's really inappropriate. If folks are having conversations they should be having them outside.

The Chair: Thank you for helping me, Mr. Julian.

As much as I agree with the help, I was hoping it would be solution-making.

Mr. Christopherson, we're back to you.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to pick up on what you just said, "solution-making". We're all for that.

If anyone wants to reflect on the beginning of this conversation, they will clearly see that the tone and the approach of the opposition was to be constructive. We asked serious and legitimate questions about the implications of passing this. We asked the most official person we have in the room after the authority of the chair—that is, the clerk, and the advice that the chair receives from her. Mr. Julian asked the question through the chair of the clerk, what are the implications if we do this? In fact, he asked that on the amendment too. In both cases the clerk said, "I can't give you a firm answer now. I need to check and I'll gladly come back to the committee." That makes all the sense in the world. Nobody demands that you make it

firm. That's why the Speaker often says, "I'll take a little time on this. I need to reflect on it. As you were, continue on, and I'll get back to you."

There's very good reason for the clerk to say, "I need a little time". The last thing the clerk wants to do, given her excellent reputation, is to give advice because she wants to look good, to give an answer off the top of her head only to find out later on that it wasn't the right answer. Then we're into a procedural nightmare and the whole thing has to be unravelled. When clerks give advice like that it has serious implications.

What did our clerk do in, most arguably—certainly in terms of the business of Parliament—the most important committee we have, and therefore the most important clerk? What did she say? "I need a little time to give the member the answer that he needs and deserves." Those are my words.

It's all very reasonable. Any reasonable person looking at these proceedings would have to ask themselves, if the government were serious about having an intelligent, grown-up discussion about changing the way that we make laws in Canada, would they be more than willing to wait at least 72 hours to allow the caucuses to reflect on this, to allow the clerk an opportunity to give her interpretation and her answer? My House leader has pointed out that nothing is going to happen negatively. In fact, nothing is going to happen vis-à-vis this at all if we don't pass it before Thursday. Waiting until Thursday is going to cause absolutely no damage to anything, guaranteed. My House leader has made the point. I didn't hear anybody from the government challenge the fact that no harm would happen by virtue of waiting.

On the other hand, my colleague, Mr. Julian, and my whip have made the point that there could be serious implications for making this change, perhaps unintended consequences, and perhaps that's the exact intention. We don't know. Since the government won't be reasonable, Mr. Chair, and allow proper reflection and expert advice then we have to conclude that this is the tyranny of the majority and that they're going to ram this through. The government members know exactly what the implications are. They know exactly what they are doing. Therefore, as I said earlier, they are prepared to trade off the negative hit they will get for being undemocratic in ramming this through, thinking it's still better than leaving the situation they find untenable right now. That's the only thing that we can conclude.

At any time someone with great credibility, like Mr. Lukiwski, wants to take the floor and say, "That's not the case, Dave, you've got it all wrong, of course we're willing to take a little time to look at this..." I'm quite willing to yield this floor—I have to watch those expressions—to allow that to happen. But that's not happening, Mr. Chair. They're sitting there and saying nothing. They're not doing anything in terms of telling me I'm wrong. You're not telling me I'm wrong, Tom. All I need is a little nod from Tom to say, yea, Dave, we'll give you two days. It's not a problem. But that's not happening. Crickets. That's what we hear over there. Just crickets.

An hon. member: Tumbleweed.

Mr. David Christopherson: Tumbleweed? Well, that's in 2015.

•(1205)

As to why it has to happen now, there is not one credible argument, not one. There is not one response to our position that no harm will be done at all to Parliament by waiting, but great harm could possibly happen. Am I saying it will and saying the sky is going to fall? No, but I can't give you a guarantee, and neither can the government members, that it won't happen, because we don't have the expert advice from our clerk.

I see Mr. MacKenzie looking at his watch and being all upset that he's being held past the time. We're really sorry to inconvenience you, sir—

The Chair: Gentlemen, through me, not to each other.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, of course, Chair. You're correct.

The fact remains that you can see the rest of the committee members just sort of tapping their toes. They were told this would be a quick meeting—as we all were. We were told it would be fairly routine, not a big deal, and when this came up, Chair, and when it started to become a problem—

The Chair: Gentlemen, thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Christopherson.

•(1210)

Mr. David Christopherson: I just get louder and louder, and we really don't need that. It's not good for anybody.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: On a point of order, and I say in all sincerity that I don't want to interrupt David's speech here, and I hope this is a legitimate point of order.... I have a question as much as anything.

I just noticed something in the motions that we passed originally, which are fine except for one little thing. If you notice under the subcommittee on private members' business, the last line says “and that Harold Albrecht be appointed Chair of the Subcommittee”. Of course, Harold is no longer a member of this committee, so I'm not sure what we need to do to correct that. I just point it out.

The Chair: Apparently, there's a note at the bottom that covers that.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Okay, good. That's fine.

Sorry, David.

The Chair: Great.

Mr. David Christopherson: I know you weren't doing any harm given my current obvious strategy. If you want to take up some more time, Tom, I'll let you speak away. That way I can have a sip of my coffee and still achieve my goal.

I can't remember where I was. I might have to repeat some of it to get back up to speed, but I'm sure the chair will assist me in making sure I don't fall back. He's paying attention. He always does. He's a very respectful chair. That's why he won unanimously. I remind my House leader sitting beside me that the chair won unanimously. There wasn't even another campaign sign on the table except his. It shows that we keep good leadership. Good leadership is what Canadians expect from this committee, and if I may, Chair, it's what Parliament expects from this committee.

This is a grown-up committee. This is the committee where people are supposed to set aside the pettiness, and if there's politics, at least it's the cutting-edge of politics. It's the hard hit of politics. It's not games, not fooling around, and yet, that's where we find ourselves right now.

We are facing a motion from a very respected member of Parliament, one of the most senior members of Parliament, and I invite anyone who has been listening to review how we approach this. We didn't come into this room and say, “We're loaded for bear, and whatever the government wants to do, we're going after them, no matter what.” That wasn't our approach. We all thought it would be a one-hour meeting to do some routine business and make sure everything is cool. We'd set up the business for the next meeting and then we'd be gone, away we go, no problem. We might have a little debate now and then on a couple of minor things, Chair, but certainly nothing that would sidetrack us or prevent us from achieving the goal of the committee which was to try to be wrapped up 10 minutes ago.

That's not the way it unfolded at all, Chair. Apparently, it's going to be the opposite kind of session to what we were hoping.

The government wanted to change the channel from talking about the Senate and some other issues that are driving them crazy. We'd like to turn the channel too and get on to doing some actual positive parliamentary business, and we'll have the fights and we'll do the political thing and all that, but at least everything is moving forward in a respectful way.

This is Canada. We respect each other. We're not getting any respect from the government on this. There's no respect shown to another parliamentarian when a motion is brought in by a majority government member at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to change the way we make laws in our country and not even allow a two-day tabling so the clerk can answer the primary questions that the official opposition and other opposition members have.

There's no respect in that. In fact, there's no respect for Parliament. There's no respect for Canadians.

The government is actually looking right now.... People need to understand that the government has brought in a motion that would change the process of making laws in a G-7 country and they won't even allow a two-day delay to allow the clerk of the committee to ask critically important questions about the ramifications, implications, and perhaps unexpected consequences of passing the motion. When the government won't even allow that, Chair, then it tells us that their interest in respecting other members' opinions, let alone good law-making, is not there.

That's not great for us. We're all busy. We had strategies too. You had strategies. We had strategies. This is not what we wanted. We had planned afternoons, too, just like everybody else, both individually and as a caucus. We had things that were in the pipe. This was not our objective. Our objective was to do exactly what we set out today. That worked for us in terms of our plans for today, but instead, everything is being derailed. All of the work of Parliament is seizing because we can't get to the business motions that Canadians, and certainly our colleagues, expected us to.

•(1215)

Every member of Parliament, Chair, is ready to get to work. They're ready to go to their committees, but nothing can happen until this committee does its work. We can't get to that because the government has brought in this motion and is giving no indication at all that they're prepared to be reasonable, fair-minded, or even intelligent, I would say, in passing motions. I didn't see any government members, Chair, when the clerk couldn't answer... Given that it was the government members who brought this forward, we can only assume, given that they are lock-step when they vote and they're lock-step when they say nothing, that this is a government motion. This is as much from the PMO as it is from Mr. Reid.

Right now all of the business of Parliament is being frozen. All we're asking for is the ability to get information from the clerk. Did any of the government members jump in and say, "I can provide answers to Mr. Julian on that, Mr. Chair, if you allow me the opportunity. I've done some research. I have some documents I can give you. I can give you some of my thinking." Even the mover of the motion isn't providing any of this information.

Mr. Peter Julian: They don't have the answers.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Julian is saying they don't have the answers, and I think he's exactly right.

That's why every government member over there needs to be prepared to answer to the media, and therefore their constituents, as to why they're prepared to change the way we make laws in Canada without even hearing what the implications are from our parliamentary clerk. It's disgraceful.

Does the government really believe this is going to hold? They're not getting this motion today. We are not without some means here at this committee. It's just a shame we have to do that in response to a government action that's preventing the rest of Parliament from getting its work done.

The government talks about wasting money. If this meeting goes through and we don't pass those other motions, there's an awful lot of money being wasted in terms of committee work not being done. The capacity is just sitting there. The staff are there. The work is done. Goodness knows, we have enough bills and issues in front of Canada. Do we not have enough problems and issues in Canada that we should be seized with, rather than having the official opposition spend its time fighting against an undemocratic motion by the government, which they're prepared to railroad through, that changes the way we make laws in Canada?

What the heck! What's going on here? This was supposed to be a simple, straightforward meeting. We come in, we do some committee business...the media didn't even bother to come into the room because they were under the same assumption as the rest of us, that, hey, it's all pretty straightforward.

Mr. Peter Julian: They're listening now.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, I'm sure they're listening now. That's my point.

Through you, Mr. Chair, have the six of them actually given some thought about what they're going to say to the media when the media asks them, on behalf of Canadians, why they aren't prepared to wait two days for an important piece of information as it regards a motion that changes the way we make laws? I suspect the media is going to have trouble finding all of them because they're already thinking about their escape route: how am I going to get out of here and get back to my office without being ambushed by the media? If the government wants to prove me a liar, that's great. I'll stand out there. Every one of you stand out there and wait to have your turn and explain to the media and to Canadians why you won't wait two days for vital information on changing the law and changing the way we make laws in Canada. Good luck with that one, my friends. Good luck.

As my House leader has pointed out, and it's the critical piece here, what are the implications of not passing this today? Well, let's see. There's intelligent conversation. There's an opportunity to think things through. There's a chance to make sure that we're actually making a positive change to the way we make laws to benefit all parliamentarians and all Canadians. It's hard to think of a bad reason for waiting.

•(1220)

In fact my House leader has challenged the government members to give one example, one good reason, why this has to be done today.

Pourquois maintenant?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The Chair is impressed.

An hon. member: We certainly don't need this earpiece.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, Mr. Butt has mentioned that he doesn't need his earpiece and he's right. Today the issue is not for his ears; it's more for his mouth in terms of what he's going to say when the government is asked why they won't wait two days to get vital information on changing the way we make laws in Canada. I mean, seriously, good luck!

Mr. Scott Reid: It's also for the good of our souls.

Mr. David Christopherson: It's for the good of your souls?

Mr. Scott Reid: What you're saying is it's for the good of our souls as well. We can act morally in good conscience, and we appreciate it.

Mr. David Christopherson: If you would like to carry on that's great. It's good stuff. I'm serious. It's really good.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's just going to give you more time to think on it.

Mr. David Christopherson: I know and I appreciate that very much. That's more who you are, sir, rather than this nonsense. That's who you are. That intervention is very much you, your humour. That's why people like working with you, and that's why we're so surprised that of all six of you, I have to say you are the last one I would have thought....

Tom's the loyal soldier. Tom's the general out on the field.

Mr. MacKenzie has the place of pride as the lead chair.

I could have expected to make other arguments about why I might think it would be Brad, Blake, or Ted, but I have to tell you if I were betting on this, I'd have lost my shirt, because that's the last person on that side of the House, arguably on that whole side of the House, never mind that side of the committee room, who would do something like this.

Mr. Reid, in my opinion, sir—and I say this with the greatest of respect, Chair—I think you are going to have the greatest difficulty explaining to the media why someone who as my House leader has pointed out is known for wanting to do the right thing.... You are always a team player at the end of the day, but I've been through—and we all went through—the whole election rules and procedures thing and that was all pretty tense. You are not one to jump in front of the microphone, but when you say something, people listen because it's valid. It's not just partisan talking points or just some petty, goofy, stupid thing that doesn't contribute. There's none of that. It's quite the opposite. Yet here we are.

Here we are at the committee called the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and the procedure being suggested has negative implications for the way we make laws in Canada. The government has decided that they don't need to wait the two days the clerk said she needs in order to give us the answers to the pertinent question that Mr. Julian placed.

To paraphrase that question, it was what are the consequences? What are the unintended consequences, or in this case maybe planned consequences? But what are they?

If it weren't a valid question and it was just the official opposition playing games then the government would have jumped in really quickly and said they could provide that answer and there's absolutely nothing for the member to be concerned about. Did that happen? No. No, they were dead quiet as they are now, just sitting there.

It would seem that if we give up talking and give up the floor they are prepared to ram this through. So we are rapidly getting into a crisis—and I hate to use the term but it is true—a gridlock, in terms of the business of just getting our committees set up.

All the government had to do, Chair, was to agree to table this and we would have passed the routine motions; we would have been out of here by noon, and all of our committees would have been given the green light to start their procedure. That's what could have happened today.

Then on Thursday we would have returned to this and had a grown-up, intelligent discussion about whether or not this is a positive change to the way we make laws.

An hon. member: Let's do that.

Mr. David Christopherson: You know it sounds a bit radical but that's where we are. We could still be there if Mr. Lukiwski would suggest that he is prepared to table—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: But I'm just not.

● (1225)

Mr. David Christopherson:—then we could still get the rest of the business done. We still have time. This can be pulled out of the fire.

We're here until 1 o'clock. I guarantee you, unless there's a change, we are here until 1 o'clock. This is just me, and there are more of us. So the government either gives its head a shake and somebody up in the PMO realizes that this is a disaster in the making and that they had better find a way in the next 36 minutes to stand down, or, if they have to, just crassly step down and consider it a bit of a hit and move on. If they don't do that, we're going to walk out of here at 1 o'clock and only two things will have happened: one, nothing, and two, there will be the evidence that the government is prepared to ram through changes to the way we make laws because they believe doing so gives them a partisan benefit. How disgraceful is that? How disgraceful is it to make a change in the way we make laws so you can have a partisan benefit?

At the end of the day, Chair, the government has the right to do that because it does have a majority. We are not suggesting it does not have the right to govern; it does, but there are ways that we govern with rules and procedures and checks and balances. That is the reason we have something called the official opposition, the loyal opposition, to hold the government to account but is loyal to the country and to the Constitution—

Mr. Peter Julian: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: You're interrupting Mr. Christopherson, but I believe it's probably good.

Go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm listening with a great deal of interest to Mr. Christopherson, but I'm hearing a lot of noise from the government side. I would just appreciate, Mr. Chair, if you could stop those satellite conversations. Perhaps those individuals could step outside the room.

The Chair: Thank you for that. It is not a point of order, but Mr. Christopherson, please go ahead.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you very much, Chair.

I heard Mr. Richards say he had problems because of the volume. I can assure him that this could stop immediately if the government would come to its senses and just say, "Hey, we get it. Sorry, we didn't know what we were thinking there. Sorry about that, and yes, of course, we'll table this for two days. We'll get the information. We'll get onto the business". Then Mr. Richards wouldn't have to listen to me any more.

Am I seeing that or not, Chair? I'm not. I'm not seeing any government members saying, "Oh, no, we're prepared to stay".

What I don't get is this: they can't win it. The politics of this are stupid too. This is what really gets me. Who thought this up? Did the government really think we were just going to sit back and allow it to change the way we make laws in Canada when we can't get an answer to the very first question we had, which is what are the unintended consequences, or at least what are the consequences of doing this vis-à-vis other procedures and the rights of members in the House—in this case, potentially Ms. May and others. But it's not about her individually. It's about the rights of Parliament, and it's the right of Canadians to have a Parliament that functions in a democratic way, and there's nothing democratic about ramming through a motion that changes the way we make laws without even having the information about what those changes will ultimately be.

An hon. member: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Christopherson: That's the substantive part of it. The politics of it is that the government is holding up every committee in the House, all of the work of Parliament outside of question period and the debates in the House, which is relatively slow moving stuff. Other than that, everything is frozen. Nothing is going to get done. Why? It's because the government has decided that it is going to make this change, and it is going to ram it through no matter what the cost.

Where the government has miscalculated is believing that we, in the opposition, would just roll over. That's not going to happen. The government will win at the end of the day.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Maybe.

Mr. David Christopherson: My House leader says “Maybe”, so there you are. As a House leader, he certainly knows things that I wouldn't, in terms of tricks up his sleeve, but the fact remains that we do respect those to whom Canadians have given enough seats to form a government. We get all of that, but the opposition has rights, and many times the rights of the opposition are actually the rights of Canadians, because when the party in power has all the power, it controls the House, the Senate, and all the major appointments.

It has all the power in the world—except this is a democracy, and not just any old democracy. It is one of the best, if not the best damned, democracies in the world. We're looked at as a model of democracy. There are other countries that would give anything to have the rights that our Parliament has. They already have the other side, the accumulated power in one place.

I've been to Africa many times as a vice-chair of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association. I've been to many countries where you know power is concentrated; it's very clear where it is, and it's all inclusive. What they are missing is an effective check and balance, a loyal opposition that has the ability to hold the power to account, not to deny them their legitimate right to that power but to hold them to account as to how they're exercising it and what the implications of exercising that power are.

Here we are. This is not the transportation committee talking about a subclause 7 of a bill that basically is not that controversial but over which they have gotten themselves into a bit of a twist. This is huge in terms of the substantive arguments at stake. What is at stake is the process we use to make laws.

I'm sure there are bigger things, but they just don't come to my mind right away. This has got to be in the top three—the process by which the Canadian Parliament passes laws and the checks and balances on a majority government. Remember, there are presidents of the United States who have said they would give anything to have the power a majority government Prime Minister in Canada has in terms of the unilateral power under the way our system has evolved.

• (1230)

By the way, we've already evolved a long way from the kind of democracy that we originally were. Mr. Reid will know this better than I, being an historian, but here in my home province of Ontario back in the day, in the 1800s—again, Mr. Reid can provide much more than I can, and I apologize, sir, if I get some of this wrong—if you were elected as a member of Parliament and you were invited to join the executive council to be a cabinet minister, you actually had to go into a byelection, go back to your constituents, and get permission from them to sit with the government.

Why? Because Parliament was all-powerful. As it is now under our structure on a flow chart, Parliament is all-powerful. If you leave Parliament—where the power is—as you're representing your constituents and you join the government, you've removed yourself, and you're playing a very different role. Back in the day, you actually had to go back to your constituents in the riding and have a vote, whereby they agreed that you could continue to be their member and, yes, assume a position on the executive council. How far have we come from that?

We've come to the point where that kind of power that individual members have...and I'm sitting here looking at six members who are saying absolutely nothing as democracy is steamrollered, and they think that's just fine. Somehow they think, within the confines and the safety and comfort of this room, that they're going to walk out that door and maintain that kind of comfort.

Good luck. Seriously, good luck. I'll be watching with bated breath to see how these scrums go as you answer to Canadians through the media to why you couldn't wait two days to get vital information on changing the way we make laws, since not one member.... My challenge still remains. It's on the floor. It's in front of you. I challenge any member over there to take up what my House leader has said and tell us what are the dire implications of not dealing with this today. What part of the sky falls in between Tuesday and Thursday if we don't pass this motion?

They're not even looking up, Mr. Chair, let alone taking the floor and giving me an answer.

Mr. Peter Julian: They're ashamed.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes. They're all thinking: “I hope Tom's doing this one. I hope Tom's going to do the scrum, because as the media gathers around him, I will exit stage left.” Or right, in their case.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you.

Mr. David Christopherson: That's all right.

Tom, listen, "you're the man". You're the man: I know where the power is. That's why I keep looking to you for some sanity over there. There has to be a piece of this that I don't get.

That's what I'm thinking, Mr. Julian: somehow in here there's a piece that I'm missing. They're going to walk out there and that piece is going to become self-evident, and all of a sudden we're going to look foolish for what we did and they're going to look brilliant. I don't know what that is. Even after close to 30 years in elected office, I still learn. I'd love to know what piece of this I've missed.

But from everything I can see, what is at stake is, first of all, the right of the official opposition to at least get answers from our clerk to serious questions on the implications of changing the way we make laws, given the complexities. Remember, we didn't get an answer to any questions. That was just Mr. Julian's first question. We don't know what other questions there may be or what questions there will be as a follow-up to that.

Normally that wouldn't be a big deal, you know: we'd table the motion, get the information, and talk it through. But that doesn't seem to be at all what the government is interested in. They're not interested in any kind of fairness here. They don't seem, Chair, to even be interested in good law-making.

The very first question that Mr. Julian asked was, what are the implications for other procedures we have for law-making in Canada? That doesn't sound like an obstructionist question. That doesn't sound like somebody who doesn't want to deal with an issue. It doesn't sound like somebody who doesn't understand the issue.

• (1235)

It sounds to me like a serious parliamentarian took seriously a motion put by a highly respected member of Parliament and asked the first question that came to all our minds on this side of the committee room: What are the implications?

This motion speaks to one piece of the process, but it clearly has an implication for another process that happens in the House. While it may be amendments from members who don't have a prayer of getting them passed if the government doesn't want them, that's not at all the point. The point is that this committee is expected and needs to know what the implications are of changes that are made.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Forgive me, I don't know the procedure or process on this, but clearly we have an impasse.

A suggestion was made by my colleague, Mr. Christopherson, to determine whether there was any openness, particularly on the government side, to seeking a 48-hour delay until the next committee meeting so that we could actually have evidence brought before the vote takes place. There are other implications for committees beyond ours to our not getting through what we were meant to do here today, and that is concerning to all of us.

Again, I don't know the process or procedure on this. Mr. Christopherson has asked for a nod or an indication, and I don't know if there's any [*Inaudible—Editor*] without interrupting what Mr. Christopherson is talking about, to have some indication from

the government if it is willing to do that, because it would allow us both to set this motion aside and allow the evidence to come forward from the clerk. It would also allow us to get through some of the other business that we're obligated to do.

Do you follow me, Chair?

The Chair: Officially, Mr. Cullen, I don't know of an official way to do what you're trying to accomplish.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Nor do I.

The Chair: It's usually handled on the sidelines.

Next on our speakers list is someone from the government, but Mr. Christopherson still has the floor.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is there any opportunity for the government, on this point of order—committees are masters of their own fate—through Mr. Lukiwski or Mr. Reid, who seem to be the ones speaking to this, to simply indicate that yes, this makes sense—

• (1240)

The Chair: I've often seen you go over to speak with them, or them go to speak to you, and I'm sure that could be what would happen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay, outside of the bounds of this conversation, let me just make the offer directly to Mr. Reid or Mr. Lukiwski, that if they'd like to do one of those offline conversations, I'm absolutely open to finding some reconciliation to this rather than having the government hold up the other work that has to go on through the House of Commons.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen, it's not a true point of order, but I understand what you want to accomplish.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You understand my intention, Chair.

The Chair: I'm going to give the floor to Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay, Chair. I'll just give a moment maybe for the government to see if they want to pick up on the offer of my House leader to try to have some discussions to find a way....

Really, Chair, all we're looking for is an opportunity to do the right thing. The right thing here is to set this aside for two days, get the information we need, pass all the other motions and let Parliament get on with its business.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Chair, I think I saw Mr. Reid's hand go up.

Mr. Scott Reid: No, I was just going to ask him when he was going to start again, but that question has been answered.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Oh, I see. Well, the offer has been made.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, you're still it.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Chair, it becomes more and more disappointing as every moment goes by. It's unbelievable. What I can't get is how the government figures they're going to win the politics of this. How? How much more reasonable can we be, other than to point out exactly the procedures that we will support in the next 21 minutes that would allow us to do the business we need to do and have a better process, or a half-way intelligent process, for dealing with an amendment that changes the way we make laws?

If I may, my House leader just pointed out to me something that is very pertinent. I had mentioned earlier that this is sort of the committee of grown-ups. This is the committee that the House looks to when there's a shemuzzle out there and nobody really knows what to do with it. You just kind of get your arms around it, throw it to PROC and they'll sort it out. Last night, unanimously, one of the clauses contained this quote:

in order to bring full transparency and accountability to House of Commons spending, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to—

It's evident that this committee is seen as the steering committee of Parliament, the executive of Parliament if you will. Yet, we see in front of us a government that's prepared to ram through...well, no, that they would like to ram it through and they're going to end up not getting at the end of the day. They're going to have to walk outside this door and explain to the media and the public why it was so important to have this pass. They were willing to let all the business of Parliament be held up so they could ram through a motion that changes the way we make laws in Canada without fully understanding all its implications. That, to me, is the exact opposite of the kind of work and leadership Parliament expects from this committee.

I sit here amazed at the government believing they're going to win this. Did you think this was just going to slip by? Did the government think that we would feel the pressure of getting things done when the responsibility is the government's because we've given them a path but they won't give us the votes? It amazes me as much as it disheartens me that this committee would be prepared to deny the official opposition an answer to the primary question from Mr. Julian to the committee clerk: if this is passed, what are the implications for other procedures that exist in the House vis-à-vis the way we make laws? I can't imagine a more pertinent question to this motion. I'm sure there will be other good questions. I can't imagine one more pertinent to the issue before us.

Before we even get into how this will work in and of itself, the question is what are the other potential implications. Mr. Julian is not making wild accusations. He's not jumping up and down on the table and lighting his hair on fire. He's merely asking a question.

Mr. Lukiwski: He did it at least once.

Mr. David Christopherson: There were no cameras then.

That's what I mean. We can have good spirits here and that's what makes this committee work. I quite enjoyed my time on this committee. It was hard work. It wasn't always the most scintillating. It was always challenging and stimulating. There were always intelligent, experienced, members of Parliament working together to try to find rule. Mr. Chair, I'm referring to the work we did on the changes to the election laws. It was fun. I enjoyed it. Like Greg, I've been around a long, long, time. Some might say too long.

●(1245)

What I get a thrill out of these days, especially at committee, is when we actually find a way to set aside our partisan differences and truly work to find a way to make something work. That's why I so love being on public accounts and sharing the work that we do. When we do come together on that committee and it works, it's exciting. It's fun. It's stimulating, and it does incredibly important work for Canadians. That's the work on the Auditor General's reports. That's what public accounts does. I so enjoy it. I've spent enough years in enough parliaments, this one and at Queen's Park, at committees and in the House fighting and fighting and fighting. I can do it. I still rise to the challenge, as you can all see, and I love nothing better than a good engagement, but I have to be honest with you that what really turns my political crank at this stage of my life is when a lot of us set aside our differences and try to find a way to do the right thing. That is so fulfilling. It's so stimulating and interesting.

That's what this committee, for the most part, tries to do. At least that's the impression I get when I'm on it, and certainly it's the view of those of us who are not permanently on this committee but are looking inward from outside. These are responsible members, senior players, people who have the ear of the ultimate decision-makers in our Parliament, people who have the ability to make deals and find compromise whether on substantive matters or on procedure and process, and there is so much respect.

That is the key that makes everything work. If we respect each other individually and as adversarial teams, we can do so much, and that is Canada. That is who we are. That's the way the world sees us. That's the way of our country. That's the reputation we like to carry. We don't have the biggest army in the world. We don't have the biggest economy, but we have the second largest land mass and we have more of a reputation than any other country in the world except, I would say, for Norway, which has taken our place as one of the top countries in the world, the ones to go to, the honest brokers. We are there to help.

When I go internationally and walk in the door, I don't get a sense that somebody is saying, "Oh, boy, here comes Canada. There goes the day", though that's beginning to change in some places—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: At the climate change talks.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, at the climate change talks it is changing. But that reputation is so powerful that even the Prime Minister and his government have not been able to tarnish it to the point that it can't be brought back. It might sound like, "What the heck is he talking about regarding the international stage and everything else?", but all that stuff internationally comes from what happens nationally, and that takes you inside someone's capital and then into their parliament and then into the workings of that parliament, and that's right here at this committee. So that reputation that we have in the world as a beacon of democracy, as a role model for many other emerging democracies, is defined right here, Chair. I wouldn't say it's in large part, but in small part.

That's what I've always enjoyed and respected about this committee. The chair is one of the finest chairs of committees in which I've ever served, and I've been on committees for more decades than I want to admit to. This chair does a fantastic job. In fact, when I became a standing committee chair, I paid him the greatest compliment by copying some of his style, especially his particular use of humour at certain times and a good sense of knowing when to push, when to pull back, when to let the committee go crazy, when to stop them completely. I say this with all sincerity and not just as filler, Mr. Chair. I've told you personally that I have the greatest respect, even when you rule me out of order. I respect the way you approach this, and to me it's indicative of why this committee works.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I have one from Mr. Cullen first. Sorry, I wasn't looking your way.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: As we go ahead with this, we're interested in clarifying the subamendment by Mr. Lamoureux right now.

• (1250)

The Chair: We're on the amendment.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Excuse me, it's the "amendment". I'm just looking procedurally at this—and this is for the benefit of other members as well. One of the questions that has come forward in the debate to this point is around the timing and the urgency of having the vote either today or tomorrow.

I wonder, through you to the clerk, whether it would remain in order if I were to seek an amendment to Mr. Lamoureux's suggestion that would actually state that the committee would come back. I've not seen an amendment like it, so I look to you, again through the clerk, to ask if an amendment can be included in what Mr. Lamoureux has suggested. We don't do friendly amendments as such at these committees, but that would include the idea of first receiving evidence back on the implications of these changes and then allowing the committee to decide. Would that be something, in your or the clerk's estimation, that would be in order—before I start drafting and consider its introduction?

The Chair: Before we discuss that one, could I go to Mr. Lukiwski's point of order in the interim and see if anything else happens with Mr. Lukiwski?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Absolutely, and then if it's okay, I'll work through the clerk to see what the wording would actually be. I'm trying to find out what the procedure would be.

The Chair: It can't be done as a subamendment, but we'll hear the other one and then we'll move on both.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'm not sure if this was a legitimate point of order, but it speaks to something that David was saying and some of the concerns that the NDP were offering because of the situation we're in now, and that is to deal with the makeup of committees. The fact that with this mini-filibuster—and I call it "mini" because David and I have gone much longer than that, and I know you have as well, so I would suggest this is a small one—there is the opportunity in my view....

Mr. Chair, I believe you've got the membership report ready to go. I'm assuming that it has been ratified or signed off by all parties. If there were general agreement among this committee—there is certainly no opposition from the government side—we could table that report in the House of Commons so that committees can begin their work.

An hon. member: Whoa, whoa. I have the floor.

The Chair: We're still on these points of order.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I didn't know if it was a point of order, but I wanted to get that on the record.

The Chair: That one we'll get to. We're still having a discussion over here on the other one.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Could I make a suggestion that rather than try to hash that out here on the microphones, Tom and I break off to the side and talk about a way through that?

The Chair: The part on committee administration?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Sure, my understanding of his intention is that the delay that has been created today doesn't affect the work of the other committees that are going ahead. There's a particular preoccupation—

The Chair: A number of things that were delayed today will cause some issues, but that for certain is one of them.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: As Tom would remember, last night we had a vote in the House of Commons about two particular committees' work. One was this one, ironically enough, urging the government to follow through on the motion we passed unanimously at the end of last session and again last night. The second one, which I know is of great importance to a lot of committee members, is the study into missing and murdered aboriginal women.

There is certainly concern in that regard among New Democrats to allow this, regardless of the games being played with this particular motion we see from the government today. I think there will be interest in that, but I think Tom and I can go offline and talk about that.

I don't want to put the clerk on the spot with my previous point of order but if there is a recommendation or suggestion—

The Chair: There does not appear, from a procedural point of view, to be a way we can amend an amended motion to include further details.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Could it then come when we deal with the main motion, if we get to that point today? Do you follow my meaning?

I just want to find an expedient way through this, which is difficult obviously if we can't get a response.

The Chair: If it were the first amendment to the main motion, you could then—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Or the motion then as amended. For example, and I don't want to delay this, but as Mr. Lamoureux's amendment is taken by the—

The Chair: You would have to key it first, but you're right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: If that becomes the main motion—

The Chair: There's a better chance of it being the real amendment to the main motion, yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right, amended or otherwise.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's the clarification I can more or less get back. What I would then do, in the interests of saving time, is work with the clerk on what the language would be. Again, I'm not familiar with using this type of technique within a motion.

We get motions like that from the House all the time.

The Chair: We try to do it a lot, but it's not possible.

• (1255)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We have one, right? The motion we voted on last night had a very specific date prescribed by the House. I'm aware of this, and it may require some extra hours now that we've lost a day due to the government motion. I think time can obviously be included in the direction a committee takes on anything, be it a study or the recommendation on a vote. This sounds like it may be into some grey area.

Regardless, I'll work with your team.

The Chair: I'm going to let you give it a try, but we're drastically running out of time.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Sure. In the meantime, I'll talk to Mr. Lukiwski.

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski, on another point of order.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you, Chair, and thanks, Nathan.

Just to short-circuit this a little bit on the role of the committee memberships—and I should have known this when I first spoke—because of the routine motions block that we've already passed, if the three whips sign off on the committee membership, Mr. Chair, you can table it today. It doesn't require this committee to do anything as long as all three whips agree.

The Chair: We do give that authority to the three whips from this committee from time to time, and so that's there, that they all sign off.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Does that exist without the committee having to do anything?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's correct. The routine motions that we passed the first thing this morning as an order of business give the whips the authority to approve—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It allows the whips to do it. That's certainly a preference. So we'll allow the whips to have that conversation and then come back.

The Chair: Mr. Lamoureux, why don't you try a point of order, because there are some people at the table who haven't had one yet.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you. I appreciate that, Mr. Chair.

I would like clarification on a couple of other issues. I make reference to the 600 murdered and missing women and I make reference to transparency and accountability, two initiatives that were taken in good faith in terms of leaving the motion that was actually supported by the Liberals going forward. Those were to be acted on today. If we adjourn at one o'clock, they won't be acted on.

I'm just wondering, Mr. Chair, will we be adjourning at one o'clock, or does the government see us going past one o'clock? How is that going to be dealt with? The politics aside, these two issues are very important to us. How will they be addressed if we do adjourn at one o'clock?

The Chair: It's not truly a point of order, but it's great information to share with all of us.

Mr. Lukiwski, on another point of order that will be similar to that...?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, just to respond to Kevin, we're adjourning at one o'clock. That's my understanding.

The committee you're talking about, clearly, the special legislative committee, and the work that this committee will be doing eventually are part and parcel of what I'm suggesting. If the whips get together and they sign off on a membership, including those two committees, Mr. Preston as chair can table that report today and committees can begin their work. There's no delay. We're saying, let's get the committees up and running. All you need is the whips to agree and we're done.

Mr. David Christopherson: But you won't table this—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I enjoy hearing you speak so often, David.

Mr. David Christopherson: And you will.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Well, we have a couple of minutes more—

The Chair: I love all the distraction—it's great—but David was saying some very nice things about the chair, so I'd like to give the floor back to him.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: You just underscored why I made the compliments Chair.

Do you want me to go back and start that part over?

The Chair: I'm working on my next householder, and some of this stuff is very important to me.

Mr. David Christopherson: I did that to Senator Runciman one time. The House was ending and I was Solicitor General at the time. The Conservatives, Runciman, Harris, and law and order: you can imagine the run I'd had with him. He got up late one night towards the end when the House was getting ready to adjourn and said some really nice things about me as Solicitor General. I put them right in my householder: "even the opposition said he did a great job". Yes, it worked.

Anyway, that said, this again is an example of why this is a good committee to be on, because there are smart, funny people here, with experience, who care, with an excellent chair. That's why it's so heartbreaking to see such an undemocratic procedure being taken. It speaks to this government's propensity for shortcuts. They're forever looking for democratic shortcuts.

I don't know about you, but one of the shows that I like to tape and keep on when I'm getting ready—and I don't know why, because it's about plane crashes—is *Mayday*. What I like about it is that at the end they talk about all the safety precautions that are built into that entire procedure.

I see this as similar. It's mayday, folks. Democracy is getting ready to crash and burn here. There are systems in place that prevent that. That's why a lot of that *Mayday* stuff is about shortcuts that are taken by pilots and co-pilots who are thinking that it's not important and it's not a big deal. Maybe you can get away with it eight or nine times out of ten, but that one time you can't, and this is the same way.

Yes, Chair?

The Chair: We're not at one o'clock now, but we're very close to it. If it's okay to interrupt you, I'd like to ask if we could have unanimous consent, because it's one of the things I have to get done today, or it would make my life a whole lot easier—

• (1300)

Mr. David Christopherson: Chair, I can make this easier for you. My boss on this committee is my House leader, so I would suggest that I'd be quite willing to forfeit the floor. You can chat with my House leader, who can give you answers on those things, because I'm not empowered to do so.

The Chair: I'd like to ask you—if it's not given, it's not given—to permit the nomination of Mr. MacKenzie to chair the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business. Once once we have that done, other things can happen from that subcommittee once we've passed unanimous consent for Mr. MacKenzie to chair it.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So that's to allow this private members' business subcommittee to be constituted and then conduct its business...?

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, I think that's more than reasonable.

The Chair: So I'll ask for that. Do I have unanimous consent? Does anybody disagree?

That's great.

Mr. Christopherson, I'll give you 30 seconds to finish up.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, just because there's a good chance I'll be returning, I do want to make sure that I leave on a good note, so maybe I'll just revisit the best part of my speech, where again, Chair, I emphasized the fantastic job you do at working through this. You deal with us characters and you keep it going. You're the pride of Parliament. We appreciate the work you're doing.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: You see, Mr. Chair, I found unanimity.

The Chair: And I found 10 more minutes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We are adjourned at one o'clock.

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