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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): We hate to keep the press waiting, so this is meeting number four of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a), we're having a briefing on the ministerial mandate.

Our witnesses today are the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, PC, MP, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, and Kevin Lamoureux, MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

This is a session for roughly one hour. I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming so we can get on to substantive work, which I know the committee would love to do.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): I have a point of order.

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Could you make it quick? I don't want to take time away....

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, of course.

I believe it requires the consent of the committee to have a new witness added on, and for Mr. Lamoureux, who is gradually rotating his way around the table—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Reid: —and will have to actually cross the floor to make a complete circuit and then rejoin the Liberals at the end of the whole process, I think we have to approve him. I don't want to not approve him. I just think we should go through the formality of actually approving the new witness.

The Chair: Is anyone—

An hon. member: Agreed.

The Chair: Is anyone opposed to having Mr. Lamoureux as a witness?

Okay. It has been agreed to by the committee. I'm not sure we had to do that, but we want to get going quickly.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Chair, do we have copies of opening remarks?

The Chair: No.

Mr. David Christopherson: What happened to openness and transparency?

The Chair: We have opening remarks of up to 10 minutes.

Mr. LeBlanc, you're on.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, colleagues, and thank you, Kevin, for joining me.

Mr. Chairman, let me begin by saluting your re-election as the member for Yukon.

Your chairman and I are proud members of the class of 2000. We were among 24 Liberals elected in the class of 2000. In the last Parliament, sadly, we dropped to four, but with your return, Mr. Chairman, we're back up to five, so congratulations.

It's a privilege to be here. I guess I'm the first minister to appear before a committee in this new Parliament. I'm obviously happy to be here with my friend and our colleague, Kevin Lamoureux.

[Translation]

I am here under the mandate given to me by the Prime Minister to cooperate in a concrete manner with the members of all parties and, of course, with our parliamentary committees.

[English]

I'm hoping that together we can bring a new tone and a renewed sense of collaboration into our House, and that we can make efforts to extend that new tone down the hall to our colleagues who serve in the Senate.

My goal of making Parliament more relevant and more effective requires your co-operation and your expertise in reviewing the Standing Orders with a view to improving accountability, making this place more family friendly, and giving members of Parliament the ability to fully participate in all activities of the House.

I'm sure all of you have read with great excitement the mandate letter the Prime Minister gave me. It was made public, but I'll briefly summarize some of the main priorities in it. The mandate letter, in my case, includes a mix of changes to the Standing Orders, some legislative changes, and what I would call some policy changes or improvements.

Many of the commitments that require changes to our Standing Orders come, of course, under the purview of your committee. For example, making Parliament a more family-friendly place is one of the things the Prime Minister has asked me to work on. It would include things like, perhaps, eliminating Friday sitting days to allow colleagues to travel to far-flung parts of the country to work in their constituencies and to plan more and better time with their families.

Another is adjusting the times we vote in the House of Commons. We all come back to vote at 5:30 or 6 or 6:45 some days of the week. We're all sitting there at question period at three o'clock. Might there be a way, in routine deferrals of votes, to take them while everybody is in the House at three o'clock, for example?

For sitting hours, maybe we can have two sitting days on a Tuesday if we're going to drop a Friday sitting day.

Those are all issues that have been around this place for a lot longer than some of us have had the privilege of serving here. I have had informal conversations with colleagues on all sides of the aisle. There is a lot of common ground. It has to be done properly and thoughtfully, and we have to understand the consequences of these changes, but I very much hope that you can help all of us arrive at some improvements in that regard.

For question period reform, we could possibly have some form of a prime minister's question period. You know that was a commitment we made. Just to be clear, that was never made to substitute for the Prime Minister's ordinary weekly appearance in question period. It was to be in addition to that, or one of the days, for example, might have that different component. There was confusion as to whether we were suggesting that he come only one day a week. That is not the case, but is there one day a week when his appearance could perhaps be more effective or different? Maybe there could be a longer time for questions and answers. Those are some of the ideas.

There's ending the abuse of omnibus legislation. We have some ideas for how that might work. There's prorogation, though that falls into a constitutional prerogative of the crown and is, perhaps, more complicated.

There is the issue of parliamentary committees and making them more effective and of giving you, Mr. Chairman, and your colleagues the resources you need. There's the issue of not having parliamentary secretaries as voting members of committees. I understand you've had some conversations at this table about that issue. There's ensuring that committees are properly resourced.

● (1105)

[Translation]

Some changes require legislative provisions, such as proposing amendments to the Parliament of Canada Act in order to make the Parliamentary Budget Officer an independent officer of Parliament, make the Board of International Economy public and reflect the new dynamic in the Senate.

[English]

There's working with the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness on a proposal to create a statutory committee of parliamentarians to review government agencies with national security responsibilities. Again, to be clear, this was envisaged to include not only agencies under the purview of the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness but also other national security agencies that would exist in other departments, such as National Defence, and conceivably, Immigration or other departments. It was a horizontal mandate across the government.

A committee of parliamentarians would obviously include members of the opposition. That will require legislation, and we're working on proposals in that regard.

[Translation]

I will also work with my colleague, Minister Brison, to implement a model that will guarantee consistency among budgets and public accounts, although I have not yet received any details regarding that proposal.

The objective is to improve the way the government reports on its spending to the House of Commons, as well as to help members carry out more detailed studies on the government's spending plans. That is one of the members' important roles, and we must facilitate their job more than we have in the past. I expect Minister Brison to obviously cooperate with this committee and with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

[English]

Scott Brison and I are hoping to organize, quite quickly, perhaps next week, a meeting to which all parliamentarians could come and informally offer some ideas of how to better coordinate the estimates and budget cycles to give colleagues more accurate and more reliable information in a more timely way.

My last set of mandate commitments would include what we would talk about in terms of policy changes. They could include, for example,

[Translation]

increasing the number of free votes, so that members can really represent the views of their constituents. That clearly affects our caucus more than other parties' caucuses, but I wanted to tell you about it.

[English]

We want to ensure that all agents of Parliament and officers of Parliament are properly funded and accountable only to Parliament. We would be prepared, at the appropriate time, to increase resources available to Parliament for these officers if they have identified certain gaps in their capacity to hold the government to account or to serve members of Parliament.

We will work with the Board of Internal Economy to enhance changes that we all collectively made in the last Parliament to require members of Parliament to disclose quarterly their expenses in a common and detailed way.

Finally, Mr. Chair, I will work with my opposition House leader colleagues and the whips to take further actions, as you may deem appropriate or as others may suggest, to make sure that Parliament is a workplace free from harassment and sexual violence.

•(1110)

[*Translation*]

In fact, all the proposals I just made are non-partisan. I want this committee to use its expertise to determine the best way to modernize the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, so as to give members more powers and enable them to better fulfill their parliamentary duties.

[*English*]

I look forward, Mr. Chairman, to working with all of you. I hope this is the beginning of a conversation we can all have collectively. Obviously you'll decide on your own agenda and your own priorities, but I would encourage you, at the beginning of this Parliament, to look at changes to the Standing Orders or other changes you may have in mind so that we can quickly put into play some of these changes for which there may be common ground and not find ourselves doing things next fall that we could do this spring.

[*Translation*]

That would be due to a lack of time or coordination.

[*English*]

I would obviously be willing to be helpful in any way I can.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc.

[*English*]

As we agreed at the last meeting, the first round would be a Liberal round of seven minutes.

I don't know who is speaking.

Ms. Vandenberg, you have the floor.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to split my time with Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

I want to thank you, Minister, for coming before the committee and for being so forthcoming on some of the things in your mandate letter. I must say I am very pleased to see in the mandate letter mention of a more family-friendly Parliament and to hear you elaborate a little bit about what that might look like with regard to things like the Friday sittings. Obviously, as an Ottawa area member of Parliament, I am not affected as much by that, but I've had a number of conversations with my colleagues who have young children and who are often flying first to another city and then to a rural area, which takes an additional three or four hours. As a local member, I can't even imagine how they are doing that with young children, or in some cases with responsibilities for aging parents or other things.

I would very much appreciate if you could elaborate a little bit on some of the things this committee could do in terms of not just a family-friendly Parliament but a more inclusive Parliament. I know that the all-party women's caucus in the previous Parliament was discussing this and had a draft report that included other things like the use of technology. When this Parliament started 100 years ago or

more, we couldn't dialogue with one another unless we were in this place. Now we have multiple means by which we can have testimony from across the country. We can do things remotely and that might allow members to have more opportunity to be with their families and with their constituents but still participate in the dialogue and discussions here.

I've heard from other members with a young child and they have had difficulty with parking on the Hill. There are people with mobility challenges. How are we going to make this a place where we can do the work we have been elected to do here and also make sure that everybody is equally able to do so, especially in a Parliament where we have more women than we've ever had—26%—and we also have a younger group of members of Parliament, who probably have more caregiving responsibilities.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Ms. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Minister, thank you for joining us this morning.

As a new member of Parliament being here for the first time, I was a bit surprised by the tone in the House. Many of the senior members are telling me that the tone is probably better than usual.

What we can do to improve decorum in the House and to make it more respectful and more productive?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and through you to Anita and Ginette.

Thank you for those questions. I'll take the last one first, and then try to conclude with an answer to Anita's question.

Mr. Chairman, the tone.... I saw David laughing and with good reason.

For those of us who have been around or served in other legislatures, the sad news, Ginette, is that the tone is actually massively better than previous Parliaments. To be fair, it's not a partisan judgment; it includes when there were previous governments in office. I hope we can make this tone last. I've talked to my colleague House leaders. There is a broad desire because Canadians expect that of their parliamentarians, to work respectfully with one another, and to disagree, of course, and have vigorous debates.

I have friends on all sides of the aisle in the House of Commons, people I really like in every political party. We should focus on that, on the things we share in common, and not exasperate the points of difference. It starts with things like perhaps not heckling in question period. Certainly for my colleagues in the cabinet, it starts with answering the questions. That had become over time a practice that was rare: ministers getting up and answering the question, even saying, "You know, it's a difficult question, and I'm not sure there's a clear answer. Here's the best shot we have in answering it." We're trying to do that. It won't be perfect. Old habits die hard, but I think we all need to make a greater effort.

The new members like you, Ginette, and colleagues in all parties are setting a better example perhaps than some of the old warhorses, like your chairman, who have these old habits that die hard.

Anita, with respect to your question, you're right; it starts with saying that it's not about taking Fridays off. There's nothing more irritating than when we have a break week and we hear, including from our own families and friends, "Oh, you have a week off." Well, actually, no, we don't. I've loaded up a pile of events, activities, or meetings in a constituency one time zone away. Some people here are from three time zones away. We work in constituencies. People who elect us expect us to be present in our ridings. Many people travel a lot further than Ginette or I do from Atlantic Canada.

When my father was elected here 40 years ago, our whole family moved to Ottawa. I went to high school in Ottawa. We sort of reversed the route that I do now, where I go home on weekends to New Brunswick. We lived in Ottawa the whole school year and went to New Brunswick in the summer. That would be politically, and I think in a parliamentary concept, much less acceptable now than it was a generation or two ago.

To reflect that, I think we look at sitting hours. I think we acknowledge amongst ourselves that we're one of the few legislatures in the country that sits five days a week as a routine. People travel the furthest to get here than any other provincial assembly. I think we can use technology to make time more effective and save money when we're in constituencies.

With respect to the Friday, the challenge will be that if we take 20% of the sitting days in theory out.... It's not the hours. As a government, we have an obligation to have a routine where we can pass government legislation or at least bring it forward to be considered, so you'd probably have to take those hours and reallocate them to the other sitting days.

Again, colleagues should understand that if the conclusion is that those four and a half hours—because Friday is a short day—should be tacked on to other days, we're wide open to that. If colleagues don't want to lose Standing Order 31 statements and want to apportion them on other days, we're wide open to that. If people want to take those questions and reallocate them in some sensible fashion, we're open to that. It's a conversation we can have. Certainly some members in all parties—I won't out them—say that it would be a great idea, so we have to resist the temptation to say, "I can't believe they want to take a day off." We all have to resist that race to the basement and have an open conversation about what would modernize this place.

That's one of the examples, but there are many others. The NDP whip talked to us about finding a child care space, as I understood it, not necessarily a child care supervised facility. That's a separate issue. There is one that's available. It may not be perfect, but it can be adjusted. It's about having a space where you could be with a small child for a brief period of time.

We should be open to all of this. Some would be for the Board of Internal Economy and some for your committee.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

•(1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc.

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thank you very much.

Welcome, Minister.

I have a few questions today. I listened with interest to some of the things you were discussing, at least in concept at this point. I certainly picked up on the idea of adjusting the voting times. It's something that I know many of us around this place have talked about for a long time, and it would make sense. Certainly, it sounds like there are some things there that we can agree on with you.

When you're talking about concepts like these, I think that a lot of times, of course, it's the details that matter. What we've seen so far from your government—I hate to say it, but it's the truth—is that talk is different from the actions. We've heard a lot of talk about openness and transparency, but what we're not seeing is the action and the follow-through on it.

Look at the first days of the government under former prime minister Harper, when the accountability act was put in place. That was creating accountability. What we saw from your government was removing accountability, the first nation to first nation accountability, for first nations people to be able to hold their leaders to account. These are the kinds of things we're seeing.

We can talk about the Senate. You promised change. Well, what you've created is a secret process that creates secret recommendations that the Prime Minister will either choose to accept or not, and they'll all be done in secret.

What we're hearing in the talk is different from what we're seeing in the action. I guess here's what I would want to know. You've talked about some of these concepts, and they sound interesting, but give us some details. Tell us some details of what you're proposing, of what you think some of these changes will look like.

Give us a sense of the process you're looking to go through in making these changes. Give us an idea of the timeline in terms of making those changes. How will all parliamentarians be involved? Give us an idea of some of the processes, some of the details here, because that's where the important points are.

•(1120)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Through you to the member, it won't surprise you that I don't share entirely your characterization of some of those initial moments of our government. We could have a conversation. I could address them all for you, and it would be entertaining, perhaps, for you and me and for others.

Let me focus on the last part of your question. You want details. I'm suggesting that we cancel the Friday sittings and reallocate those hours that would have been on a Friday to other sitting days. We could decide on what days make the most sense. If you and your colleagues want to take those questions and Standing Order 31s and, again, allocate them over a bunch of other sitting days, we would be open to that.

My suggestion would be that Tuesday may have to be characterized as two sitting days, because it may be a very long day in order to accommodate people travelling on the Monday. You could use those two days in a Tuesday. I'm told by the clerk that some other parliaments have done this and have characterized that as two sitting days, because as you know, for government legislation, often the Standing Orders talk about how many sitting days there are for particular dispositions. You'd have to look at the supply day consequences of getting rid of one of the sitting days. We would be open to those kinds of changes.

I would agree with you, Blake. Let's take, for example, as a matter of routine, deferring votes to three o'clock on the following day or at the end of question period. Private members' votes held on Wednesday evenings at the end of government orders, instead could be held at three o'clock on Wednesdays. We could change the committee schedule, obviously, to accommodate that.

We would be wide open to all of those. Those are just a few concrete suggestions, but the reason I wanted to come here, frankly, is that you asked how all parliamentarians would be engaged. That's by doing exactly what I'm doing this morning, coming here and asking for your advice. Those changes are properly and correctly the purview of your committee. I would welcome—and I know my cabinet colleagues would and Kevin would as well—the benefit of your advice, your report, and your suggested drafting of any of these changes.

As for other ideas, the list is by no means exhaustive. If you have other ideas, we would obviously welcome them enthusiastically.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. I appreciate a bit more detail there. We'll look forward to some more detail, hopefully in the days to come.

While we're on the topic of some of the promises that maybe are not being kept fully at this point, I think one of the things in your mandate is to ensure that parliamentary secretaries are no longer part of committees. Certainly, I suppose in some ways you could claim that it might be the case, this having and not having. We only have the one committee that's up and running at this point and Mr. Lamoureux is sitting down there with you today.

In the previous meetings we've had, he's certainly been here, directing the government members and being the main participant on the government side. One could certainly argue that despite his not being a voting member, he's still a very active member of the committee, even though he's not officially a member. Certainly, even when we were into some of the details of how we would have our routine motions work, he was very involved in that effort and the negotiation that took place around that.

When you have parliamentary secretaries here participating in everything that's going on—he's obviously here with you now—how

will that work? Explain that to us. Is that how we'll see it in all committees? Is that what's going to happen? Is the parliamentary secretary still going to be very active in directing exactly what's going on in the government side? Is it the intention of the government to do that? Is that what we should expect to see?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Obviously, it won't surprise you that I disagree with the way Blake said that the campaign commitment was that parliamentary secretaries would not be on committees or serve on committees. To be precise, as you picked up at the end of your comments, it was to not be voting members of committees.

As you know, I think it's Standing Order 114—

Mr. Blake Richards: Sorry to interrupt.

I guess what I would have to ask, then, is: how is that a change? Not voting doesn't mean that they can't direct how everyone else votes. It doesn't mean that they don't direct what's going on at committee, so what change is that, really, other than in some kind of theoretical world? How is that a change?

• (1125)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I sat on this committee when your colleague Tom Lukiwski was very much the director of this committee. I saw it, sitting on the side of the table you're on now.

Mr. Lamoureux is an experienced member of Parliament and is, as all of you are, entitled to go to whatever committee he decides to attend. It's a long-standing tradition in the Standing Orders—

Mr. Blake Richards: So I think what you're saying is that there's no change at all. Is that what you're saying? There's no change at all.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: No.

The Chair: That's time.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Minister. My first two thoughts upon listening to your presentation were, first of all, that you are fair-minded. I think you're sincere in what you're putting forward. That's the impression I get. However, given the experience on this committee, certainly the devil remains in the details. We've already had a little bit of a struggle in terms of manifesting the words “transparency” and “openness”, and the actual decisions that we make here. I'm not going to revisit it. I'm sure you've been briefed on it. It's not worth going back to, but to me, it's indicative of words going in one direction and actions going in another. At some point, I hope to see the two sync up.

I'm going to remain guardedly optimistic going forward.

What I'll do with the time I have—having been here long enough, I know that once I let go of the floor, there is no guarantee I'm getting that sucker back—

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Blake was fairly successful at getting it back.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, and that's why the chair's going to make sure that doesn't happen again. I'll make sure that I'll get my stuff out there, and you can respond as you deem appropriate, Minister.

First off, on the parliamentary secretaries, again, it's almost like we come in now and it's *Where's Waldo?* I never know where he's going to pop up. He started over there, then he went to there, and now he's over there. I mean, it really does beg the question: why does the parliamentary secretary need to be on the committee if the whole purpose is to make committees more independent?

I say this from experience and partly as a confession. When I was parliamentary assistant to the finance minister back a long time ago at Queen's Park, I was on the finance committee. Make no mistake, I was there to ride shotgun. I was there to make sure that the government majority's will was exactly what prevailed. We weren't even pretending that it was any kind of independence. It was them and us.

That's the world we've had up until now. Your government has come in, Minister, and said you want to do things differently. We're hearing the words, but we're not seeing the action. If you really wanted to send a strong message.... Never mind technically whether the parliamentary secretary can vote or not. It's whether or not, as Blake has said, they're sitting here, orchestrating, as a general on the field, all the team and where they're going. They give a nod and that's where the vote goes. That's where the majority is, and they control this committee 10 times out of 10.

I say to you, in a sincere effort to respond to the effort that I think you've made to be sincere, that if you really want a notion or signal of change, remove the parliamentary secretary. There are still BlackBerry's, staff, and all kinds of means. If you really want to say that things will be different, that you want committees to work a little more independently and be less partisan, then please remove the one person who ties this committee work directly to the executive PMO and the control of the majority. I leave that with you.

Secondly, the PBO...excellent. I'd be interested in hearing what the time frame is to make them an officer of Parliament, given that the Liberals finally came around and agreed that it needs to be done. It's the same with the BOIE time frame. I know that we have House leaders there who can do this, but you're already up and meeting, and I haven't heard any time frame. I'd be interested to know what that might be.

For the estimates budget process with public accounts, you may know that I've sat on public accounts since I got here in 2004. I'm the longest-serving member. My advice would be to go root and branch, to go right back to the basics, so that the working understanding is good enough that if you're a new member, you understand exactly how that process works and then reflect that in the way we change things. Right now, the truth of the matter is that there are very few parliamentarians who truly understand in detail the estimates and the public accounts process that we go through. I think you've touched on an important thing, but please don't go halfway; go all the way. Let's just revamp this so that the public can follow it too.

Next, the family-friendly thing sounds great. The one thing we're a little bit cautious of is that the Liberals under former Premier McGuinty did this in Ontario in 2008. One thing they did was to change question period to the morning. Virtually everybody, and I'm advised that includes even the media gallery, acknowledged that it was done so that the government would have an opportunity to change the negative message coming out of question period and turn

it into a positive message before the six o'clock rotation came around.

Regarding the Standing Orders, we spent a lot of time on this in the last couple of Parliaments. It took us I don't know how many meetings to come up with a report that we called the "low-lying fruit". We all agreed, and it was the simple stuff. But that's the past. The heavy stuff is now in front of us. You want to make major changes, and I'm very interested to hear whether or not those changes will only take effect if it's a unanimous recommendation of this committee. Will you do it with just one opposition party, or is the government prepared to ram things through on its own?

With regard to in camera, I have a proposal in front of the committee right now. I'm sure you're at least aware of it. Perhaps you could give us your thoughts before I head into that debate and give some idea of whether you, as the government House leader, are prepared to entertain some rules around when we can go in camera and what we do there.

Finally, on prorogation, there was a ton of work done one or two Parliaments ago, back when we had minorities. We did a lot of work. Joe Preston was the chair. I would urge a revisiting of that as the starting point, because it addresses a lot of the constitutional things. We had all kinds of experts come in. It was a great civics lesson. We didn't come to a conclusion, but we learned a lot. I would just ask that you maybe consider that.

With that, Chair, I'll say thank you.

● (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. House leader, you have a minute and a half.

Mr. David Christopherson: I left a minute and a half on the table?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: You left a minute and a half, but you raised seven issues. You're an experienced parliamentarian, David, so you would know; I'll pick and choose the easy ones and then the chairman will cut me off.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, he will, but there's a second round, remember.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: You got your comments on the record.

No, I appreciate the spirit in which you began your comments. I share that view. I am optimistic too that we can make incremental progress. It won't be perfect and there will be moments of disagreement, but where we can come to a broad consensus on Standing Orders, on legislation, and on just operationalizing some of these things that we all, at least in informal conversations, share, I think we should move expeditiously.

With respect to the public accounts process, you're absolutely right; it evolved—this is not a partisan judgment—over a number of governments and Parliaments into a process that was disconnected and unintelligible. I will suggest to my colleague Scott Brison that he have a conversation with you. Your experience on that committee will be useful. He is going to ask colleagues on the public accounts committee to help him fashion this. He and I will try quite quickly to arrive at a way to better align this process.

But you're right; we'll do it substantively and seriously, and not tinker with it. Otherwise, we won't achieve the objective.

Am I out of time, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: You are.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Okay. Well, you'll have five on the table when we come back.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Graham.

Mr. David Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Minister, thank you.

Chair, I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Chan.

I just want to say quickly that I was a staffer in the 40th and 41st Parliaments, and I have seen a lot of dysfunction. As a former staffer, I think I have a different perspective, and I am looking forward to taking on these challenges head-on.

I kept my old boss's office, and I just changed desks, which I think was a lot of fun. I'm already seeing a real change, though, as a member.

Being an MP has severely hurt the time I have for my two-year-old daughter. I think that's the big issue for me. I come to Ottawa and I work 12 hours a day. Then I go back to the riding and work 12 or more hours a day there, too, except that I also have to drive a few hundred kilometres around my 20,000-kilometre riding. My wife and my daughter often come with me, which is wonderful. I'm very lucky. Most people don't have that option.

Since I'm expected to be everywhere all the time in 43 municipalities, do you have any suggestions on how to do better family friendliness on the riding side of things? We always talk about what happens here on the Hill, but not so much about what we do on the other side of this job. Thank you.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, David.

To be honest, I hadn't reflected. I have a riding, perhaps not as large as yours geographically, but there are the same kinds of issues with francophone, anglophone, and aboriginal communities. When I became the member of Parliament in my riding, there were two traffic lights. I think there are now eight, so there's been a very marked economic improvement during my tenure. But it is like yours. I envy you. In your constituency, there are at least some larger urban areas, compared to rural New Brunswick.

It is a challenge. I know what I have done—and other colleagues have more experience at these kinds of issues—is to say that if I'm going to the northern part of my constituency and there are a series of local community groups or municipal leaders or others who have

been calling the office to set up meetings, I try to bundle them. If I'm going to drive x number of hours, I borrow a municipal office in a small town and set it up as a satellite constituency office, and I invite people from that particular area to come to meet with me. We try to spend half a day or whatever time's allowed, and I can clear up a number of meetings and not go back over and over it again.

People at this table may have suggestions around how the Board of Internal Economy could, either through technology—and I know colleagues have more experience than I might with this—or through different allocation of resources.... For some people with huge, northern, and remote ridings, the points system, for understandable reasons, may not marry up with their particular transportation needs. I think the Board of Internal Economy should be wide open to listening carefully to ways that we could maybe not even change the budgets, but adjust the rules in a way that better serves colleagues with unique needs in their constituencies.

I don't know if that somewhat answers your question, David.

• (1135)

Mr. David Graham: It certainly helps. It's largely what we're doing. My riding is large enough that, effectively, travelling to my second office takes a point. If I go to my office every week and I come to the Hill every other week, the points are pretty much gone. If my staff have to travel to a city council meeting, often that means travelling well over 100 kilometres.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Right.

Mr. David Graham: We do try to group them, but that's not always realistic. We have to work to their schedules as well.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Of course, and if you want to bring your family to Ottawa, you'll quickly reduce the number of points available for work.

Mr. David Graham: I'm very lucky that we can drive, but most people aren't in that situation. Thank you.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the government House leader for being here.

First of all, I wanted to go back to some of the comments I listened to from my colleagues on the other side. I'm not sure I completely agree with the characterization.

Let me start with the issue of parliamentary secretaries and perhaps how we've been conducting ourselves here. As my friend Mr. Christopherson has noted in the past, a lot of us are relatively new parliamentarians. Obviously, we want to draw upon an experienced parliamentarian regardless of what his role happens to be before this particular committee. I think the role of parliamentary secretaries will be much more significant in other committees particularly in standing committees where not only is the parliamentary secretary bringing the expertise of a specific ministry to the table, because in many ways that individual will be the best informed individual, but also that person is here to ultimately facilitate our work before this particular committee. I simply want to say that I welcome the ongoing advice and mentorship that Mr. Lamoureux has been providing me in my new role as deputy government House leader.

With all due respect, I don't see any direction coming from my colleague. It's simply to better understand how the rules in fact actually operate. You saw how we operated in the last sitting of this particular committee. We came to a consensus on one particular issue and we split our votes across the aisle on another one. Let's see how we ultimately practise. I would simply implore my colleagues on the other side to give this a shot.

I want to address one particular issue with the government House leader rather than just making a long speech. That's with respect to the issue of decorum. I want to go back to some of the practices in the House. For example, there is one specific suggestion that came from Jason Kenney about perhaps removing clapping from the House, and I want to know whether the House leader thinks this would in fact make the House itself a more collegial place. What would be the appropriate way in which we would conduct ourselves that would be more reflective of the mother of parliaments, the United Kingdom Parliament, in terms of appropriate decorum.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Arnold I share your view on the parliamentary secretary's circumstance. Obviously, I benefit enormously from the advice of Mr. Lamoureux, his counsel, and his friendship. He has, in our view, a very easy access to some of the senior officials in the Privy Council office, including my deputy minister and others, who support me as the House leader. It can be useful to committee members as you're looking at a whole series of issues for Kevin to be able to quickly and efficiently access some of the senior advice.

Arnold, with respect to the clapping, do you know what? You're right—it uses up time. The Speaker was a bit late, I guess, getting to question period. We finished question period and it was 3:30. If that incrementally starts happening, colleagues will miss other meetings, committees will get delayed, and witnesses will wait. If it was the consensus in this committee that this kind of manifestation... I'm not sure whether people like it on TV. If you're in the House, the validity of an answer or a point shouldn't necessarily go with the volume of clapping. It does use up time. Colleagues get cut off in questions or answers because the Speaker includes the clapping time in those transactions. That may be a very useful suggestion to improve decorum.

• (1140)

The Chair: That's your time, Mr. House Leader.

Now we're moving into the second round, which is a five-minute round.

We'll start with Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I might do the opposite of what Mr. Christopherson did. I'll ask you individual questions and wait for your response on each one, and then we'll see where that takes us.

I want to say, however, that I very much agree with the compelling nature of your mandate letter. I read it to our children every night before bed. It puts them to sleep. I'm hoping the illustrated edition will be out soon.

I wanted to ask you a simple question to start. Regarding the changes that involve standing order changes, is it your intention that this committee do that work and then submit a report to the House or do you have another mechanism in mind?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad to hear that your children enjoy the mandate letter as much as I do. We're hoping to get a YouTube version of it in English and French.

Mr. Scott Reid: I actually rapped it to them.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: The Prime Minister's schedule is such that he and I are trying to get to a studio together to do it. It's comforting to know that they go to sleep knowing that Canada is a better place. I thank you for that.

Again, Scott, my preference would be that this committee could, if you can arrive at a consensus or a process, quickly recommend some changes and bring those in as a report. We would be wide open to another mechanism. If you would prefer to make suggestions in some form of a more informal report, then I would turn it into a government motion, number whatever, and we would have a debate on it. I would be open to that as well.

It's really a question of what we all think is the most effective use of parliamentary time and your committee time. If you have the time to do a report that would achieve common objectives, we would be wide open to that process. If you have a better suggestion, we would certainly be open to that as well. You have a lot of experience with this stuff, more than I do, Scott. Whatever process you and your colleagues here at this table would find useful, I think would be one that I would want to start with.

Mr. Scott Reid: I have just two suggestions, then.

One is that I think it would make sense for us to look at things on which we have a greater degree of consensus and put those forward. There's no need for there to be a single report. It would be helpful to take on the things that we can all agree on quickly, especially because right now we have a fairly limited number of things on our agenda. That will get worse as time goes on in this committee.

The second thought I had was that... You know what? I've forgotten my second thought, to be honest. I started going back to your mandate letter and it just crowded that out—

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I know, you get delirious reading it, Mr. Chairman. I understand that, but—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Scott, you make a very valid point. If we can quickly arrive at that consensus—I think that's what I said in my opening comments less eloquently than you just did—on five items that we could quickly turn into standing order changes, I would urge you to consider doing that quickly and first. If other items require more study, or you need to hear from witnesses, or you can't get to a consensus or arrive at a conclusion, they could be put off for a subsequent time when the committee would judge that it wants to go back to them.

I think what I was trying to say is that if we're going to make some of these improvements, I would hope that we would make them sooner so we could all benefit from them for a longer period of time in this Parliament.

I don't want to be a cynic, and nobody here who knows me would think that I would be at all cynical about these things. There is, I think, as David said in his comments, and maybe Ginette and others, an amount of goodwill that I hope we can make last for the entire Parliament, teasing aside.

But as significant pieces of legislation land, there will be very complicated policy issues, and if we can in the short term arrive at some changes, let's take advantage of the goodwill that I think we all see. It's not perfect, and it may not be always at the same level, but let's take advantage of what goodwill there is now if we can arrive at some changes.

Mr. Scott Reid: I do remember my other point, which is simply this. It may make sense with some things to put them forward as temporary standing order changes and see how they work out. We can give it a year, or whatever the committee decides, but that is one way of greasing the skids for something that not everybody is 100% sure about.

• (1145)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: We would be open to that as well, to have them sunset, or to find a way, not to take up parliamentary time.... If they proved to be as effective as we hope they would, then they would stay. If not, there would be a mechanism by which you would revert to the other Standing Orders. Again, that seems to me to be a perfectly appropriate suggestion.

Mr. Scott Reid: I think I'm out of time, so thank you very much.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right. In that case—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Reid: The designation of Tuesdays as two sitting days, I would assume, would have the effect of causing any current standing order that refers to the number of sitting days not to be changed in terms of how long the government has to report back, to respond to something, and that kind of thing. Is that right?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: That is my understanding, but to be honest, I am not.... This was a conversation I had with our Acting Clerk in a hallway where he said to be careful because there are these downstream consequences, so I offered that as one suggestion that I'm told other parliaments have used, but your views and the views of the committee on that exact issue would be important.

It is not intended.... There's no trick in it, but I want to be up front. I cannot be in a situation where we would agree to something that would have a very significant reduction of our ability to move government legislation forward. That's no secret here, so finding the right balance, we would be wide open to that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. House Leader.

We have a five-minute round for Liberals.

Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Minister, thank you for being here today.

Coming back to the point about a family-friendly Parliament, I was talking with one of my NDP colleagues a couple of days ago. I had a very difficult time making the decision to run in this election because I have a young son myself, but she is trying to manage a child under one at this point. She was saying that the day care facility here doesn't take children until 18 months. I think that's a difficult issue for her.

As well, once I became aware of what the schedule here in Ottawa is, I saw that it's a very gruelling schedule. I don't usually get back to my place—I'm choosing to stay at a hotel right now—from the office until nine or 10, because I have constituency work to do when I get back to the office around seven or eight. That's why I've made the decision not to bring my son here. I figure I won't even see him when he's here.

But what do parents do who bring their children here? The day care ends at a certain time. I've seen it closed when I usually get back to my office, and for those who have children that are under 18 months, how can they serve?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thanks for those comments. You reflect—you personally, but I think all sides of the House now—a very positive trend toward having younger members of Parliament elected, including young parents. The NDP caucus in the last Parliament was, frankly, a huge step forward in making our Parliament more conscious of some of those challenges, and it continued, thankfully, in the last election as well.

Your specific question around child care hours and the rules around when children can be left in the appropriate child care facility are properly the purview of the Board of Internal Economy. I sit on the board. All parties have representatives on the board. We should and can look at that, because other colleagues have raised it. The NDP whip raised a version of that concern. I think there certainly would be a willingness to fix that. It's an administrative financial issue, I think. I'm no expert in how to operate high-quality child care facilities, but I think these issues can be resolved.

To be honest, though, it will have to be done in a way such that Canadian taxpayers are treated respectfully in terms of what is the portion that we would expect parents to pay, versus the employer. I think to be fair those issues have to reflect what's done in other jurisdictions.

Kevin, do you want to add something on the family-friendly piece? Do you have comments?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): I think the only thing I would acknowledge is the fact that we need to recognize that the issues we raise on this side are shared on all sides of the House. As the House leader made reference to, we need to work with all MPs from all political parties. I think that today, more than in the past, there seems to be a lot of goodwill there, for a number of different reasons. The official opposition, the third party, and the government all seem to have an interest.

I think it's coming up. Each caucus has their respective commission flowing ideas, so that some of them will go through BOIE, while others might come back here in terms of what sorts of rules we can change in the Standing Orders. Some of this is outside PROC's jurisdiction, but collectively I would think that the parties working together would be able to get it done in dealing with child care and other issues, if that helps.

•(1150)

The Chair: Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the time.

I too am the father of a young son, a four-year-old, so I welcome some of these suggested changes and look forward to working with my colleagues on this committee and hopefully making this a more family-friendly place. I welcome that discussion and look forward to it.

I want to quickly reference a few things that were mentioned.

Your party ran on openness and transparency. My first meeting was not too long ago, and again the parliamentary secretary was here and there, and then slowly moved away. Now, I understand that he's not a voting member, but the involvement was supposed to be removed. What I witnessed in that first meeting is that he was basically directing traffic. I know you said that about the experience, but it still goes to the issue that Mr. Christopherson mentioned about how you remove yourself from the majority government and how you become more independent. Again, as a new MP who was just elected, I heard what was going on throughout the election, and then I watched what happened in committee. They were two totally different things. If you want to expand on this, I'd be happy for you to do that.

Again, I'm concerned about the Senate process, with the list going in secret to the Prime Minister. In secret, the Prime Minister makes that recommendation, and you really never see the names. You really never see what is going on. I think that needs to be a little more transparent. I agree that change in the Senate needs to be done, but to me that secrecy doesn't change anything, really. It's still in secret and you don't actually see what's going on.

In terms of electoral reform, you may have said something different, but before Christmas you mentioned that you have ruled out any kind of referendum on this subject. I apologize if you've changed or if something happened after that.

I was at the minister's breakfast earlier this week. Everyone sat at a table and took suggestions. Everyone at the table had something different to say on electoral reform, every single person. There were eight people at the table, and we had eight different ideas, good or

bad. At the end of the day when you choose somebody, you'll choose one method out of all these suggestions, and I think it's very tempting for any government in power to take the suggestion that benefits them and say that they've consulted Canadians and, "This is what they say".

I urge you, Minister, to reconsider, if you haven't already, your stance on that referendum. I don't think it prejudices any process. I think you can still consult and you can still come up with the ideas, but at the end of the day, I think you look at that idea and say to the people, "This is what we've consulted on and how about this?" I think we really do need to have that referendum on this. You've seen it in other jurisdictions and I would urge you to look in that direction.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you very much, and congratulations on your election to Parliament. I hope that collectively we can find a way such that your four-year-old son will see his dad more often than perhaps other kids in different Parliaments saw their parents. That can be done in a way such that we can also serve our constituents and fulfill our responsibilities here.

On your comments about openness and transparency, I understand what you're saying. I came from a cabinet committee this morning on open and transparent government, so we have a cabinet committee focusing on these exact issues.

With respect to the Senate process, I hear what you're saying. In a different frame and a different constitutional context, there may have been a different way to do it. We are very much guided by the Supreme Court of Canada reference that Mr. Harper's government brought—we thought properly—to the Supreme Court to clear up what are in fact the rules. What is possible? What's not possible? It should bring clarity to the conversation around how to improve the Senate and to understand when you would or would not trigger a constitutional change.

Our commitment was to make incremental improvements while not reopening the Constitution. This more inclusive process, by which we hope the Prime Minister receives high-quality recommended names from a committee of people who are not strictly partisan advisers, we think is an incremental improvement.

On this business about releasing the names, we had a conversation about that, to be honest. Suppose the advisory committee gives the Prime Minister five names in the case of an appointment from New Brunswick. I'm not sure that the five people who may agree to be on that list to be considered as a potential appointment to the Senate would agree if they thought the list was to be made public, because to some extent it is a judgment on the four who weren't selected.

In a judicial appointments process, the Attorney General has a list of qualified persons determined by a judicial advisory committee. Every time we make a judicial appointment, we don't announce that there were 38 people on the list who weren't selected and we chose the 39th one. I'm just conscious from a human resources perspective about doing it in a way that respects privacy but also the professional and personal lives of the other people. That was the thinking behind it, but it may not be a perfect solution. In our view, it's a beginning and an incremental improvement.

• (1155)

The Chair: Madam Vandenberg.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I see that we have with us an independent member, Mr. Thériault. If he wants, I will yield the floor to him.

The Chair: Mr. Thériault, go ahead.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have five minutes.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Okay. Thank you.

I listened carefully to what the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said.

You are all familiar with the situation of Bloc québécois parliamentarians, who are all elected under the same banner. Among the government's reform intentions, I would have liked the government house leader to say this morning that he wanted to respect the mandate the Prime Minister gave him and make it so every parliamentarian can benefit from the same means to have their voice and the voice of their constituents heard in the House.

You know that we do not have those means. We are proposing a solution. We have sent a letter to the speaker and to all parliamentary leaders. I want to tell you what we are proposing.

We do not want to be recognized based on the arbitrary 12-member rule, but, at the very least, given the parliamentary work we have to carry out, we should receive at least ten-twelfths of the budget that was considered important to be given to 12 members elected under the same banner.

We would like the Internal Board of Economy to adopt a rule, so that all members elected under the same banner would receive the budget they need. At this time, the Bloc québécois members have to use part of their constituency budget to pay their staff working on the Hill.

Of course, I appreciate being given five minutes to speak this morning, but under the current rules, we are excluded from committees. We have also been excluded from special committees. In order for us to be able to plan our work, we should at least be able to participate in each committee meeting to have a right to speak. I want to specify that we asked for a right to speak without a right to vote.

Earlier, the minister talked about giving more powers to members, so that they could carry out their parliamentary duties. He intends to

meet with parliamentary leaders to find a common ground. The intentions are there, but they are not materializing.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I want to congratulate Mr. Thériault for being elected to the House. As my colleagues know, Mr. Thériault is an experienced parliamentarian who sat on Quebec National Assembly for a number of years. His presence in Parliament as an experienced parliamentarian will be even more valuable.

Mr. Thériault raised questions about the participation of the members of a party that has not reached 12 elected members. According to a number of Standing Orders of the House, those members are technically independent and cannot participate in committee meetings.

We are open to discussing the best way to enable them to participate in those meetings. I have had positive discussions with Mr. Thériault and his colleagues, as well as with the parliamentary leaders for NDP and the Conservative Party. I am very happy Anita gave Mr. Thériault an opportunity to speak. I hope this will be a tradition we could continue in committee meetings.

During speaking rotations in the House of Commons, I believe we offered our colleagues from Bloc québécois an opportunity to take the floor on a few occasions. That time could have been allocated to the Liberal Party. Through whips, we offered members of Bloc québécois to take the floor. I hope we could continue in that tradition.

To my knowledge, the Board of Internal Economy has not yet made a decision when it comes to resources. I have participated in all the meetings. Since the election, we have had only one one-hour meeting, when we had to approve the budget.

I think the problem will arise in the procedure of committee meetings. I was honest about that with Mr. Thériault when I explained the situation. Permanent committee members have very little time to ask questions and speak out. If, at some point, independent members who are non-voting members but participants were to take the floor, that would reduce the speaking time of the members of other parties that managed to have more members elected. The NDP had four times as many members elected as the Bloc, and the Conservative Party had ten times as many.

It is not easy to make a decision on this. We will continue the discussion, including with other House leaders, while respecting all members.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1200)

[*English*]

Thank you, colleagues. This brings to a conclusion something I know you've been looking forward to for many weeks, my appearance here.

I thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank you, colleagues, for your suggestions.

I do hope, teasing aside, Larry, that you'll invite me back.

Colleagues, I hope that even informally we can work on things. It doesn't always have to be in such a formal setting. My office is just off the foyer, and I would obviously be happy to chat informally or in small groups or whatever you think is appropriate.

Thank you, Kevin, for joining me at the table. It's part of the evolution of Kevin's movement around the table.

You'd better watch out, Larry. He could end up in your seat at some point.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

The lunch is here, so we'll suspend for a couple of minutes.

•(1200) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1220)

The Chair: We had better get started or we won't have any time left. I have just a couple of housekeeping points.

Last time, we talked about having the names up front. I had a discussion with the boss of the clerk, and it's been a tradition not to have their names up front, for a couple of reasons. One is to keep them out of the spotlight. Also, sometimes they change during meetings.

I suggested that, as we did, as a compromise we would pass around a sheet with those names on it that you could have in front of you for the whole meeting, the names of the clerk and the researcher who happen to be at the particular meeting. That would serve the same purpose and we wouldn't be flaunting their.... We don't want to get them on our bad side because we need them.

Of course, for the new people, the proceedings and verification officer up here will turn your microphones on normally, so you don't have to worry about that. Also, the contact information for the clerk and our Library of Parliament researcher is on the committee website and in the briefing book you were provided.

There are two things that hopefully we can accomplish. One is that we have a motion. The other is that we have to decide—either us or the subcommittee—what we're doing at our next meeting next Tuesday. We haven't given any thought to that.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: In light of the time, as it's pushing 12:30 and we need to have our business for the next meeting, I don't see my motion getting resolved today anyway, given the limited time.

Once again, if it's helpful to the committee, because this ended up being a notice of motion—the clerk can correct me if I'm wrong—I believe I have the option of either calling it or not. Therefore, I can pass on calling it and we could go to business. It might take a little longer than usual because we're not doing it as a steering committee. The worst-case scenario is that we do our business for the next meeting and we're out about 10 minutes early. Either that, or we can

dig into it at the tail end and just start and then carry it over, but I kind of like to do things fresh.

Anyway, I leave that with you, Chair.

The Chair: I appreciate that offer. I'll accept that offer, because I think it would be a very.... I hope our committee can accomplish something. If we can get something for the next meeting, we can keep going.

Thank you very much. That's very co-operative, and I think it's very helpful for progress in Parliament here. We will let you call your motion at another time, or at the end today if we have time and we'll start it. Otherwise, we should decide now what we want to do at our next meeting. I think we should decide now as a group, if we can, what we should cover in the next meeting.

We'll go to Mr. Christopherson and then Mr. Reid.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

Our plate is quickly going to fill, as I think members are beginning to see, and we'll be overwhelmed. Managing our time is one of the most stressful and difficult things for us to work out. The government House leader asked this committee if we could come to agreement on as many standing order changes as possible, to get those in the system and in place as quickly as possible, so that we could live under those new rules. It would make sense to me, although I would certainly be willing to listen to other thoughts, that this has the most time-sensitive nature to it in terms of changes. I for one am willing to support the aggressive agenda for changes, because I think those changes, if they live up to the words, will be good. That's why I'm prepared to move things out of the way and get at it.

Just as a cautionary note before I shut down, this is not nearly as easy as the minister led to believe. We spent—I see David over there smiling, because he remembers when we went through this—probably the better part of a calendar year just on what we were calling the “low-lying fruit”. In other words, it was the issues where we all agreed. It wasn't that complex. It wasn't controversial. If there was any controversy or disagreement, we set it aside and said, “Okay, that's not part of the low-lying fruit.” Everything got shovelled over there. It was all we could do to come up with a limited number of very minor changes.

I'm not overly optimistic that we can do it as quickly as the minister might like, but it seems to me that if they're serious—and I take them at their word that they're asking for our input as to how to approach this work—then beginning on the Standing Orders would be a good place, in light of the time sensitivity and the amount of time it takes even to just find the ones that we all agree on.

Before I relinquish the floor, Chair, I did raise this quickly in my little stream of consciousness with the minister, but I am serious. One of the things we used as a working tool when we were looking for what we called the low-lying fruit.... By the way, that report was issued, it did go through, and it was adopted by the House. They weren't big deals, but we did have the agreement that if anybody at the table, any of the caucuses, disagreed, it wasn't going forward.

I did ask the minister, although I didn't really expect he could answer it or would want to given the time available, but I put the question to you, Chair. I'd like to hear from the government. If we get into a crunch, and we're very likely to, on rule changes, how will the decision be made? At the end of the day, is it just majority rules and that's it—too bad, so sad? Alternatively, will we say, “No, if we can't reach unanimous agreement, we won't put forward changes to the rules”? Because all it will do is recreate a partisan fight in the House over rule changes that are meant to be non-partisan.

I would just leave that with you, Chair. Thank you.

•(1225)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I was part of that process too. Looking back at it, I think one of the approaches we had last time, and that I wouldn't recommend doing again, was that we wanted to have a single report. We went through all of the rules. We essentially were trying to see how many rules we could get agreement on and whether we could work it out. On some things we achieved success, and on some things we clearly weren't going to achieve success and we put them aside. But on the many items where we might have achieved success, we talked and talked and talked.

Basically, I think what happened was that the deadline we had to make our report dictated the amount of time we put in. It was a version of Parkinson's law: the debate filled the available time.

It was a different model. We got as much low-hanging fruit as we could manage. We got the easy stuff. Standing on our tippytoes, we thought we might be able to reach the stuff, but we did a little hop and we couldn't get it. That's my apple metaphor here. It was all under the assumption that the picnic is over at a certain time, but until that happens, we can keep on going.

I think this time I would suggest a different approach. If we can take an item and resolve it, then we should just have a little report and send it off to the House. This committee, of course, is always generating little tiny reports, far more reports than any other committee, and far briefer reports. I think that would be appropriate. Then we seek the concurrence of the House. Presumably we would have an agreement that any report we're issuing here will be concurred in. Obviously that's subject to the parties agreeing, but it's not to turn that into an all-day concurrence debate. It's not an excuse for that. It's just to get concurred in. Then we can get that rule in place and move along.

The Chair: Depending on what the Bloc does.

An hon. member: As long as we have agreement.

Mr. Scott Reid: You're right. The Bloc and our Green member might say something different, but I think we should say that would be the agreement among the three parties who are actually sitting on the committee. That would help things along. In other words, I guess to channel Mackenzie King, I'm advocating for it being as piecemeal as necessary but not more piecemeal than necessary.

•(1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Having participated in that third party perspective, I think with the way it worked last time, it was very beneficial. I think that would be applicable this time around also, David.

I think what we saw from the government House leader's presentation is that he really and truly is approaching this with a very open mind. The feedback, from what I understand—and you can talk to your respective House leaders—is that there has been a considerable amount of dialogue on these issues already. To a certain degree, I think there might be an expectation, and the question is how we can best achieve and meet that expectation, which is universal on all sides of the House.

Before when we had low-lying fruit, it was really low. If we try to get into too many of the details.... If we have this general consensus that we want to change Fridays and have voting only on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, and not have votes after three o'clock or whatever it might be, if we have the general principles, then maybe we can even approach the respective House leaders to see if they have some recommendations as to how they would like to proceed. I believe Dominic made reference to the fact that he's even open, if PROC wants to see it, to the government bringing in a separate motion. I think having informal and formal discussions would be healthy but they would not necessarily be about the low-lying fruit. Another way is to look at some of those tickets that can address those family issues that we hear about from all sides of the House and how we might be able to act on them.

I would expect that it would all be done through a consensus.

The Chair: Okay.

I'm not hearing any objections to Mr. Reid's suggestion that we do an item at a time. If we were to do that, which item would you like to start the next meeting with? There were about five that the House leader suggested.

Mr. Scott Reid: Can I suggest that we actually start by trying to compile the...? Actually, I agree with Mr. Christopherson. I really wish the House leader had brought his notes, because then we could be going through them and discussing them right now. I can remember little bits here and there. I also wish I had made better notes, to be honest, so it's partly my fault.

The Chair: I have the mandate letter. I can give you a copy of that.

Mr. Scott Reid: I know the mandate letter well, as you know.

The Chair: Yes, so do your kids.

Mr. Scott Reid: I was going to say I could do a rap if you wish.

I think we should sit down. That's a good idea. We'll take the mandate letter and we should go through and say what each of us envisions on these things and try to come to an agreement. We could try talking about that now. I'm saying we should do that and come back with suggestions as to who has some expertise. He said that a legislature or maybe several legislatures had done four-day weeks, for example. I know that Ontario has. It would be reasonable to start by trying to get some officer of the Ontario legislature here. That's one example of the kinds of the witnesses I want to think about.

We could come back to the next meeting with lists of witnesses. They don't necessarily have to be for one topic. They could be just to try to get a sense of what we're biting off. I don't know if that's helpful.

The Chair: Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Might I suggest we even just go with the thematic aspects that come within the minister's mandate letter? The other way we could potentially look at it is to go through the Standing Orders by topic and then chunk it up that way. That's just another way to apportion the work. The real question is whether we do it as a committee as a whole or we just break off into having the subcommittee set that agenda.

Mr. Scott Reid: Normally the subcommittee meets at the time allocated for this meeting, right?

The Chair: Yes, but that does take up time.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I don't think there's a real obvious way here in this. We have to make it up as we go along. Is there merit in asking each of the caucuses to, number one, go back through not a thoroughly exclusive list but a list of the things that each caucus thinks is a priority they would like to talk about, and number two, give us some idea of where they might want to go just in general terms? Then, Chair, we can schedule a meeting of the steering committee. Even though we haven't finished all the rules yet, we can get through. Let the steering committee chew on it and come up with a proposal and a process that comes back here.

Obviously, what the minister said was important and reflects where the government would like to go. I'm sure that we and the Conservatives have options. We've all done this before.

Anyway, just as a starting point, I throw that out. Ask each caucus. Even if it's not on paper, verbally each of the representatives could be ready to come to the steering committee to provide a little more of a fleshed-out idea of where each of us would like to go. Then we can see where they intersect and try to identify the stuff we think would be the low-lying fruit, part two.

It's just a thought, Chair.

• (1235)

The Chair: Okay. Let me paraphrase that. If each party went back and their representative on the subcommittee came with, out of the mandate letter—there are about five things there—what their priorities are and the things they think we could work on, the subcommittee could present that as an agenda for our next meeting.

I'd like to add a little amendment for discussion. As a task-oriented person, Mr. Reid has suggested that there are people with expertise

in a number of these areas. Maybe we could think of one of those obvious people to have here for one hour of our next meeting so that we get the discussion under way, in the meantime going in parallel with the same process.

The other thing is the timing of the subcommittee. Often it's done at the time the committee would normally meet.

Mr. David Christopherson: No, no, outside of the committee time, Chair, please.

The Chair: That will speed up our time, yes.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I want to start this by asking David a question.

Were you in the legislature when there were five-day weeks, or were there four-day weeks when you were there?

Mr. David Christopherson: They were five days.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, so that postdates you.

The obvious, then, if we're starting with that one, is that I would suggest getting the clerk of the Ontario legislature to comment, assuming the individual was there both before and after the change. They could comment in a non-partisan way on some of the practicalities of things that have arisen as a result; it would just be business. For that person, you'd want to check how long they've been the clerk. You'd want to make sure they were clerk when the transition took place, or deputy clerk. Assuming that's true, I would suggest starting with that person. I don't have a name, I'm afraid.

The Chair: Are there any comments on that? For our next meeting, we'd invite the clerk or someone from the clerk's office in the Ontario legislature who has expertise on both four-day and five-day sittings.

Mr. Chan.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Is this a past clerk? It's probably not the current sitting clerk. I think the Ontario legislature returns after Family Day.

Mr. Scott Reid: So that means they're back next week?

Mr. Arnold Chan: No, the week after.

Mr. Scott Reid: If we met with them next Tuesday—

Mr. Arnold Chan: We could, if they're available.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes. We'll need to find out, but that's just a suggestion. There are other legislatures, I gather, that have this as well. Ontario is the one I know about because I live in Ontario, and I'm envious of my MPP, who gets a day....

The Chair: Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I'm wondering about this. If you try to relate to a provincial legislature that might have some commonality with Ottawa, you could look at a legislature like Victoria's, where a vast majority of the MLAs are rural. I don't know how—I have no idea—their voting process works and at what time. There was a suggestion that we maybe look at the possibility of having question period earlier as opposed to two o'clock, and there are the days of the week and so forth.

There might be some benefit in looking to the B.C. operation and the clerk's office, just to see if there's some value in having them also come down to make a presentation, if you're looking at a second one. Again, the vast majority of MLAs live well out of Victoria, so travel is a big issue in British Columbia, more so than in other provinces. That's a suggestion you might want to consider. If you're doing Ontario—

Mr. Scott Reid: You're suggesting a panel of experts.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I think maybe you can get someone from the clerk's office in Ontario and someone from the clerk's office in B. C. and hear what they have to say. On at least those three items, and possibly four, you can ask them for their opinion. For example, what have they been doing to be family friendly in the last few years? When is their question period? Was there a justification for it? Do they sit on the Fridays? As I say, I have no idea if they sit on Fridays. I don't know. I just think that they share a lot of things we would share in terms of distance-related issues.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Building on that, we could still have clerks from the House here who could comment on at least the viability of some of the options they're hearing, to give us a little more focused attention.

In other words, they could say, "That one idea sounds really good, but it would be difficult for us here because of this and this." Or they could say, "It's up to the will of the parliamentarians; however, it is doable. It's not that big a deal." Or they could tell it is a big deal. That's helpful too, because it gives us an idea of what the implications are of the changes we might recommend.

I think we're beginning to see a path, Chair.

• (1240)

The Chair: Yes. I think we would ask the clerks, whichever clerks we're asking, to tell us the consequences of some of these changes, because there would be consequences.

Were you suggesting that the panel would have three clerks on it—B.C., Ontario, and a local clerk here?

An hon. member: Yes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I wonder if it would be useful to also have somebody who would bring the international context and look at what some other countries have done. I know that there are organizations in Ottawa, such as Parliamentary Centre, that do international work with parliaments. It might be worthwhile to bring in somebody who can bring that context as well.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Why don't we start by asking our analyst about this? We don't even know, in this group, which of our provinces have

four-day as opposed to five-day sittings. That would be a start, just getting that list. I wouldn't recommend looking at the States, because everything about congressional life is just different. Possibly we could look at Australia and New Zealand. I don't know about New Zealand, but the Australian states are geographically large enough that they'd have similar problems, and it's our system.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Andre Barnes (Committee Researcher): Mr. Chair, I had looked into the matter for the all-party women's caucus a couple of years back. It's not necessarily fresh to me, but Ontario has made some changes. They now sit earlier. British Columbia has made some changes.

I think you might be correct about Quebec, but I don't necessarily recall. I know that Scotland has made some changes as well. I don't recall seeing that Australia has, frankly.

The Chair: Could you do some research as opposed to discussing it now?

Mr. Andre Barnes: I'll put it in a briefing note.

The Chair: You can bring something for the next meeting, a little bit of the international stuff.

I think with three clerks to start with, that would probably be a big enough panel.

Mr. David Christopherson: Just as a thought, Chair, I really liked Scott's idea earlier. The minister indicated that he was open to the idea of putting something in place, trying it out, and having a sunset clause or review clause. That makes a whole lot of sense.

In that context, I just want to suggest that, based on my experience—and I've been doing this for an awfully long time—I think we oughtn't be afraid to be bold, and, dare I say, even revolutionary.

I say that in this context. I was first elected in, believe it or not, 1985. I was elected to Hamilton City Council and regional council. We were called "aldermen". There was absolutely no washroom for female council members. It was all geared to males. There was a washroom attached to the lounge, and it was private, but it was male only.

I've been around long enough now to see the first deaf person in the House of Commons. I've now seen those in wheelchairs twice—

The Chair: Three times.

Mr. David Christopherson: —yes, three times—and other changes too.

If you look ahead, let's say 50 years from now, they'll look back at where we are today and it will almost be like the story I'm telling you now, where we had to convert a closet into a washroom for that female councillor. We were still fighting about whether it was "aldermen" or not. I mean, that's how far back it goes. It shows you the kind of change that needs to happen.

Again, it's based on what's happened, especially in the last two Parliaments, the last one and this one. There are so many younger people.

Jamie, it wasn't always that a male politician would be as quick to jump in and say to Ruby, a female politician, "I have the same issue. I have a four-year-old son." I mean, those roles were so defined. There was no blurriness in the lines, but you're in a time when you can say that you too have a four-year-old.

What I'm saying is that we have to make this place more real, and this is key to it. If we're going to attract more women.... Yes, good, we probably have more women here than ever, but we're still not there. We have a long way to go. I've worked with young women and have encouraged them to get involved. My wife is very active in electing more women across partisan lines.

A lot of the questions you raised, Ruby, and what you went through in terms of what to do about your child, all that reluctance—we have to remove all that so that the pressure of whether you go into public life is predicated solely on your personal circumstance, not your gender, or whether you're a mom or a dad. It should be built in.

We're starting to get there, and history is telling me that we will get there. I'm just saying let's not be afraid to be bold, to really, really shake it up. If something looks so obvious to us, and using Scott's technique of building in a fail-safe for ourselves a year or 18 months from now, let's go for it. We're going to get there anyway. Let's try to get there as quickly as we can to make this kind of change. We still have a long way to go, but with the kind of serious young politicians who are here now, I really feel like now's the time. Let's grab it.

Thanks.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Christopherson. I agree. Hopefully, we won't get tied up on technicalities that would stop us from doing that.

For a way forward, let me propose what I think we've agreed to, which is that for our next meeting—and this might take the full two hours, actually—we should try to get the three clerks, from B.C., Ontario, and the House of Commons. Sometime between now and next Thursday, which we can discuss in a minute while the subcommittee meets, we'll bring back the priorities of our parties, out of those five or so items that the House leader mentioned, and then the subcommittee will decide how to direct the Thursday agenda or witnesses.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: In the interest of clarity, Chair, I suggest that you and/or the clerk send out an email advising what it is that the caucuses have agreed to do, because right now, it's just

words. You get to these meetings and someone says, "Oh, I didn't realize I was supposed to do that", and then we lose that time.

Maybe we could get a short memo advising exactly what it is we're being asked to bring back, or it could be clearly stated now in a sentence.

The Chair: Let's say it now so it will go into the minutes, and we can take the minutes back.

It was your idea. Do you want to put it in English?

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks. I would seek the assistance of the clerk to help me explain what I said—there's an impossible task.

Do we want caucuses to go back on everything, or are we focusing just on family friendly right now? Do you want to focus on family friendly and see how that works for us?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Could we call it inclusive Parliament? That way, it can include—

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I might suggest that we just limit ourselves to putting down no more than three items, and we'll agree to a deadline.

The Chair: Do you mean items out of the mandate letter?

Mr. Arnold Chan: I mean sub-items within the mandate letter.

Mr. David Christopherson: I have to tell you, I kind of like the idea of us doing them one at a time. What was the term that you just used?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: It was inclusive Parliament.

Mr. David Christopherson: "Inclusive Parliament", I like that better.

If we just focus on that as a starting point, we can broaden this quickly if we want to. That way, we'll come to a meeting and we'll all be ready with our thoughts on that. That seems to be the one that we're most interested in, because it affects day-to-day life. We want to get it in place, try it out, and amend it down the road if we need to.

Maybe we'll do just that one item, Chair. It's complex enough.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I certainly agree in principle with the approach being suggested here. My only concern is with logistics.

As our member on the subcommittee, I would really find it difficult to get the input I would need from my caucus that quickly. Obviously, we meet once a week as a caucus. That would probably be a good opportunity to get that so we would be able to do that next week and come with the input from my caucus, but I don't really feel that I'd be doing it proper justice.

Maybe we want to look at doing that right after the break or something.

The Chair: Okay. We're going to have a break week, so why don't we schedule for next Tuesday and Thursday some obvious witnesses that we can come up with on the point the House leader made? Then, before the Tuesday after the break, we'll get some feedback from House leaders, whips, or larger caucuses, and that will determine our agenda for those weeks.

Mr. David Christopherson: That's probably a good idea, because it will also help inform us as to what is doable and what isn't, and we would be equipped to talk to our caucuses and then have a knowledge-based discussion. I like it.

Mr. Arnold Chan: I would just remind you that we still have to deal with your motion.

Mr. David Christopherson: I appreciate that.

Mr. Arnold Chan: My point is that it might eat up a significant part of Tuesday.

I want to get back to my earlier point. I was just saying that there are very specific ideas within each of the inclusive Parliament concepts. I'm saying let's limit it to no more than three concepts that each caucus would bring to the table.

One other idea I just want to throw on the table is whether we also want to invite any sort of deposition coming from members who are not part of a recognized party. I'm just putting that out there for everyone to consider.

• (1250)

Mr. David Christopherson: Do you mean in public, if they want to come down and make a submission?

Mr. Arnold Chan: That's exactly my point. We all have the same privileges as members.

Mr. David Christopherson: I know. I'm saying that maybe we should invite other members who want to come forward to make presentations and talk about their personal issues, so they're not just speaking to their own caucus but actually speaking to all of us about their issue. That would include the independents.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I agree. I think it's important to have that perspective. I agree that we should have the clerks here, but the members are the ones who are living it, day to day, and they have the personal experience and knowledge behind it. I think somebody who's been here for years could speak to it properly, and then someone new could, so we would get a good cross-section of members.

The Chair: What if we invited to the Thursday meeting next week any member of Parliament who wanted to appear before us on these types of topics?

Before we leave, though, I would want to refine down what that type of topic is.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I think we have to be somewhat careful with that, in the sense that I could envision getting a number of Bloc members, for example, coming in and saying that what they want is party status and they want to change the standing order to reflect that party status. What they want, even without the party status, is to have Bloc representation. It might take us off the focus in terms of what it is that we're really trying to do.

If the idea is "family friendly" or other terminology, whatever is best for the committee, I think we need to have a better idea of what we want. We can always open it up for everyone to provide comment on this; then at least they have a sense of the package if they want to add further comment. My concern is that it becomes very convoluted really quickly. At some point, the Bloc and all people should be engaged in it. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying they should be excluded from the process, but I think we need to have a better sense of the direction that we want go in.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think there are ways around solving that problem, such as maybe getting past parliamentarians. As Mr. Reid was asking Mr. Christopherson earlier, "Have you been both in the legislative assembly and an MP on the Hill?" Maybe it's about finding people with both experiences or perspectives. Somebody who is not currently serving might help alleviate that problem.

The Chair: Mr. Graham.

Mr. David Graham: I have a very quick idea to throw out here without having thought it through that much. What about inviting some spouses to come and speak about the real experience of being married into this crazy job?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's an interesting thought, actually. A number of the people who retired at the end of the last Parliament surprised me. I'm not going to mention names because it may be that in some cases health concerns were the real driving force. But they were people who would have been re-elected—they were in essentially secure seats—and they seemed to be enjoying their jobs.

There are people from not just the last Parliament but a number of the previous Parliaments who might be able to shed some light on this. With a bit of judicious searching, I'm sure we could find some people who could explain what the particular stresses were that they faced and caused them to leave. That's a possibility.

The Chair: Just so we don't run out of town, I mean time—

An hon. member: Is that a Freudian slip, Chair?

The Chair: Right, out of town.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I want to get exact details of the next meeting. First of all, we're going to ask those three clerks to comment on the items in the mandate letter, or do we have a specific sub-list, a shorter list?

Mr. David Christopherson: I have to tell you, for what it's worth, Mr. Chair, that I think we should start with just the one subject and see how we do. It's complex enough. It has so many moving parts to it.

The Chair: We'll define that once our—

Mr. David Christopherson: There's the inclusive Parliament, the family-friendly piece, and I would suggest confining it just to that for now until we get our sea legs, our rhythm, and then we can start tackling.... If we put too much on there, it's going to be overwhelming and we're not going to get anywhere. That's my worry.

The Chair: The clerk doesn't quite understand. Could you be a bit more detailed on the items under the mandate letter, items that fit under that topic?

Mr. David Christopherson: My concern was that if we just say anything in the mandate items, which really is anything under the sun—

The Chair: No, that's not what I'm saying. Just define that a bit more: the inclusive and the family friendly, the Friday sittings—

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes.

The Chair: —changing the votes.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, it's anything at all that affects the life here, the rhythm. I don't know how you phrase it.

• (1255)

The Chair: Okay, so we're agreed on that for Tuesday's meeting.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, but what it's not about is public accounts and estimates. It's not about the Senate.

What it is about is anything that has to do with making this a more inclusive Parliament, family friendly, call it what you will. For anything that the caucuses believe is part of that rubric, bring it to the steering committee, bring it to the discussion.

The Chair: Mr. Graham.

Mr. David Graham: Are we limited to two meetings a week if this gets out of hand?

Mr. David Christopherson: No. We can meet as much as we want.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. David Graham: That's good.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I wonder if it might help if we give a few examples. For example, Dominic talked about two sitting days on a Tuesday, the Fridays, and the time in which we have votes inside the House. Those are a few of the specifics, just as examples. Others might want to throw out another couple of examples, but those are the three that come to mind right away.

Mr. David Christopherson: It's not a child care space, but a private family space, if that came up. Personally, I would leave a little more latitude for each of the caucuses to come up with whatever they think is part of this, and they can make the argument.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: They could cite a few examples of what they're talking about.

Mr. David Christopherson: Sure.

Did we agree, Chair, that we would hold these hearings first and then hold a steering committee, and at that time we would bring all of it together and then bring a path back to the committee?

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. David Christopherson: I think where we were heading was to let ourselves be informed by the witnesses before we talk to our colleagues, so we can pass that on to them and bring back the information in the context of what we've already heard.

The Chair: Okay, we have agreed on two things so far. We've agreed on what we're going to do at the next meeting, which is now, as you outlined it, before the steering committee. The second thing

we agreed on was that our analyst is going to bring us back some international research.

Now, since we're not having a subcommittee meeting until after Tuesday's meeting, we have to decide what we are going to do in the Thursday meeting spot.

Mr. David Christopherson: Do you mean next Thursday?

The Chair: Yes. We have some suggestions about spouses or about parliamentarians from other parties.

Mr. David Christopherson: There's always my motion.

The Chair: There's your motion.

Mr. David Christopherson: If you're looking for really good work to do, there it is.

The Chair: It's up to the committee.

Mr. David Christopherson: It would be best if we could finish it before the steering committee. It's not absolutely necessary, but it would be helpful to have it nailed down ahead of time.

The Chair: We could split the meeting and have your motion for an hour and the steering committee for the second hour next Thursday.

Mr. David Christopherson: We could do that.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. David Graham: And we could stop even if it's not resolved.

The Chair: Maybe we should do it the other way around. Have the steering committee first in case your debate takes two hours.

Mr. Arnold Chan: It's subject to the availability of the clerks of the other Houses, so we may have to have some flexibility on that point.

The Chair: Obviously.

Mr. Blake Richards: My understanding was that we were thinking of doing the steering committee a little later than next week.

The Chair: Do you mean so there would be feedback?

Mr. Blake Richards: I might make an alternate suggestion. Our analyst has indicated that he might have some stuff he can go back and look at with regard to other legislatures, parliaments in other countries that are doing stuff. Through some of the discussion here there's been talk about former parliamentarians, etc.

If we're going to look at the motion with those things, maybe we could have kind of a committee business session on Tuesday to allow for some of those things. Maybe we could use some of that time as well to have our analyst give us some feedback on what we might be able to do. That gives you a bit more time to schedule a witness for Thursday. There might be a suggestion to have a couple of different panels, although I think maybe the clerks might take up a full two-hour session. That would give us a little bit more time, until after the break, to talk to our caucuses before we have that steering committee.

The Chair: I had forgotten we were going to give you more time to go to caucuses, so on Thursday we could do a bit of your report.

Mr. Andre Barnes: To get the research done and translated, I'd have to do it today, so it would be a very scant report. A preferable deadline for it would be next Thursday, if the committee can accept that.

The Chair: That's what we're talking about. Sure.

Mr. Andre Barnes: Okay, that's Thursday as opposed to next Tuesday.

The Chair: Next Tuesday we're going to do the three clerks for two hours. Next Thursday we can do your report for an hour and then we'll have Mr. Christopherson's motion, which we can debate right through the break week if we can stay.

• (1300)

Mr. David Christopherson: We'll shuttle in.

The Chair: Is that it? Does that sound good to everyone?

The directions to the caucuses are that whoever is on the steering committee from each caucus should come back with, if they can, some preferences or priorities or input on this family-friendly agenda from either your House leader, or your whip, or your entire caucus, or however you work internally.

Mr. David Christopherson: Where are we bringing that, Chair?

The Chair: It is to the subcommittee meeting, which would be after the break. That's a good point though. We have to decide when exactly that would be.

Mr. Blake Richards: There are two things. I would suggest that in order to allow us a couple of potential opportunities with our caucuses, maybe we'd try to do that later in the week after the break week. That would be my thought on that.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Blake Richards: The other thing I was going to ask, which I'm sure David would want to know as well, is who the government member is on the subcommittee, just so the two of us will know. I can't remember if we settled on one or two additional members from the government after all that.

The Chair: There are two. I think they were talking about it this morning.

Mr. Blake Richards: For the steering committee.

The Chair: Have you picked out who will be on the steering committee?

An hon. member: Ruby and Arnold.

The Chair: Okay, there you go—and the chair and the vice-chair and Mr. Christopherson, right?

Mr. Richards, when do you think we should have that subcommittee meeting?

Mr. Blake Richards: Others might have a different opinion on it, but I personally would prefer to leave it until after our caucus meeting that week, which would normally occur on the Wednesday morning. It could be Wednesday afternoon or Thursday or whatever, but I personally would prefer to see that.

The Chair: But it's the one after the break, not next week.

Mr. Blake Richards: Exactly, after the break; that way there's an opportunity....

I don't know what the caucus meeting looks like for my party or for any of the others in terms of an agenda for next week. So just to allow two potential opportunities to raise it at our caucus meetings, I would prefer it to be after that.

The Chair: If we do that, what are we going to do in the Tuesday meeting after the break?

Mr. Blake Richards: We may have some suggestions coming out of Thursday, right?

The Chair: Okay.

On Thursday, after your report, we will.... Let's say it's 45 minutes. We'll take 15 minutes to decide what we're doing the following Tuesday, and then we'll have an hour for Mr. Christopherson's motion.

How does that sound?

Mr. David Christopherson: That sounds doable.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

I think that's a very good schedule. Seize the moment.

The meeting is adjourned.

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