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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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• (1220)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): I want to do a couple of routine things.

Mr. Saganash is not technically on the committee; he is replaced. This means that he doesn't get the reports right away. I'd like to have permission, and I'm sure everyone would agree, that anything coming out related to that—

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Do you need a motion to that effect?

The Chair: Shall I just assume that we have committee consent?

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, definitely.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. He can get all the reports directly, as they come out.

On Tuesday in the first hour, this committee, with the attendance of the subcommittee members if they so wish, will present the subcommittee's report on changes to the code on sexual harassment between members to the independents, should any choose to come.

We haven't exactly decided who is going to present to them or what the process of that meeting is. Does anyone have any suggestions as to how we should structure that meeting? We don't want to just open it up and say, "Okay, here it is." We're going to give them each a numbered copy, because it's confidential, which they'll give back at the end, but someone should present basically what the major changes are that we made. Is that not so?

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): I'm not sure what you're suggesting, but you were the chair of the subcommittee. Would it be best for you to do it?

The Chair: I could, if that's what you think. The procedure is up to you guys.

Mr. Blake Richards: That would probably make the most sense.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Does it have to take PROC time to do it? This is just to the independents, right?

The Chair: Invitations are already out.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Oh, I see, so it's already set for 11 o'clock next Tuesday.

The Chair: Yes, and members of PROC and the subcommittee have been invited, and the CHRO.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Did you say the independents, the independent MPs?

Is the purpose of the meeting so that the independents can hear about it?

The Chair: Yes, so that when it comes to the report in the House, they're not—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —they can't say, "We don't know what's going on."

The Chair: Yes, and they can't deny unanimous consent because they haven't even seen it.

An hon. member: That would be fair.

Mr. Scott Reid: Will this be in camera?

The Chair: It's in camera, because that report is still secret until it goes to the House.

Mr. Scott Reid: I for one would be most comfortable if you were to lead this. You did chair it and you have the necessary *gravitas*, in my opinion.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I liked the first part of what you said.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Reid: If you had more *gravitas*, you'd be able to recognize seeing it in someone else.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Oh, I see. It's my lack of *gravitas* that—

The Chair: Well, if you had a more beautiful riding, you could—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm not going there, Chair. Them's fightin' words. You know that.

The Chair: All right, I'll present the report. I'll briefly outline the major changes, not all the technical points, and then leave it for them to ask questions of us. It's one hour.

The other thing that we've agreed to do is come back to this indigenous language study on Thursday.

Is that what you want to do for one hour?

Mr. Blake Richards: Are you talking about doing it on Thursday, May 31?

The Chair: Yes, next week on May 31.

Mr. Scott Reid: By definition, if we do it then, we have to slot in a further time, somewhere in June, perhaps.

I'm assuming you need a further seven days after that, but we haven't completed the process of giving you, Andre, the entire first draft to work on, so you have partly a first draft and partly a second draft.

I'm positive we're going to need a second meeting. Can we slot that one in as well? Is it reasonable to say May 31 and then come back on June 7, or is that not enough time?

Mr. Andre Barnes (Committee Researcher): It would frankly depend on the next suggested changes. It could well be quick.

•(1225)

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

Obviously my concern is that we're going to face a point at which we won't be able to submit it, because it has to go out to translation, and we're going to do a line-by-line at some point, and I'm worried. I don't want us to slide past the end of our session.

The Chair: Could it be May 31 and June 7, for one hour in each of those meetings?

Mr. Scott Reid: Could we try doing that? That would seem reasonable to me.

The Chair: Does that make sense?

Mr. Scott Reid: I just want to make sure it's okay with our analyst.

Mr. Blake Richards: The question for us in that scenario is.... I know it's something in which you can't foresee what could potentially be, but could foresee, I guess, the greater amount of what you might expect or of what there could potentially be. Would this hour still leave you enough time? Do you believe that it likely would?

Mr. Andre Barnes: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay.

The Chair: I have one other very minor thing, and this is just a personal request, not for any discussion right now, but for people to get back to me on personally.

I am vice-chair of the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region. Every Arctic country except ours does electronic voting. We've discussed it a bit in examining the Standing Orders, but I'd like people to get back to me personally—this is my personal request—if you have any interest in our discussing this.

I don't want to discuss it now; just get back to me.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You're talking about the House and not general elections, right?

The Chair: Yes, just for the House.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, we've talked about it, right, Ruby?

The Chair: Don't discuss it now, but get back to me if you have any interest, and then I'll pursue it somehow.

Mr. Scott Reid: Can I ask one more question about this? So every country—

The Chair: Northern country, polar country....

Mr. Scott Reid: Does that include the United States?

The Chair: Yes. I've been there.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's electronic voting, so it's voting in the chamber. Do they all require you to be physically in the chamber? To me that's a great sticking point, because the idea is you can vote from your office.

The Chair: I'm just asking if people want to discuss that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Maybe, yes.

The Chair: I don't want to discuss it now, but if there's an interest in discussing it, and if people come back to me, then I'll bring it forward again.

Mr. Scott Simms: Fair enough.

The Chair: Is that okay?

Yes, Mr. Richards?

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, on the other item, we had the acting CEO, who is being tapped to be the permanent CEO.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Blake Richards: That was earlier in the week here. During that meeting I moved a motion, because I think there was some information about the process that was sort of important to PROC's examination of that matter.

I don't remember what the deadline is, but I think it's a fairly short deadline in terms of our reporting back our thoughts on that. Do you know what the deadline would be on that?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Lauzon): It would be 30 calendar days, which would bring us to June 7.

Mr. Blake Richards: We would have to do that fairly quickly, and I think that it's important to deal with the motion and have that scheduled as well. We need to schedule some time for that discussion and potential witnesses.

Mr. Scott Reid: Schedule the witness, and by that, you mean the minister.

Mr. Blake Richards: About the process, which we weren't able to get answers on to our questions.

The Chair: Okay, we're open for discussion now on that and, obviously, we've had a bill referred to us, so we can discuss that.

Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Are we discussing the motion?

The Chair: No, I just said we'll discuss the schedule, which includes your motion.

Mr. Blake Richards: If that's an opportunity, I'd like the floor then on that at this point of time to address my motion. Is that in order?

The Chair: Right now we were just discussing when to put your motion in and when to have the discussion.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, okay.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: If I understand the various pieces at play, we have the briefing next Tuesday from 11:00 until 12:00. The following Thursday is an hour for the indigenous language report. Is that right?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We have this notice of motion from Mr. Richards, and we have the second Thursday, the seventh, for the second hour for what we suggested this morning, the indigenous language report and Bill C-76. Have I got all of the pieces right?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: As some members will know, there's been... I'll speak to the bill. I don't have any particular comments on timing in terms of Blake's motion. The other pieces seem to be set in, and we have to work around that.

Bill C-76 is very large. Governments refer to it as a generational change. There are 350 pages, and 250 of them are text and changing law. The timing is, of course, difficult, as Elections Canada had an end of April deadline. The bill was introduced in May. It was moved through the House under time allocation, passed last night, and referred to us this morning. Is that right, Chair?

• (1230)

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay, with what I see as a very few weeks left, if the government's ambition is to have the entire bill passed through all stages of the House prior to summer, I think that almost automatically requires the government probably to move time allocation on report stage and third reading, but that's not our business. Our business is the committee doing a proper study.

It bears some noting that... I forget the total number of days, but certainly a couple of months were spent on the unfair elections act. Excuse me, it's officially called the Fair Elections Act.

Mr. Scott Reid: It was Bill C-37.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Bill C-37 would be its most neutral—

Mr. Scott Reid: Bill C-23. There you go, I remembered that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Bill C-23.... Memories fade, don't they? It was a classic.

That legislation we spent a couple of months on. Obviously, there have not been a couple of months made available to us to spend on a bill that I would actually say is more ambitious in scope, because Bill C-76 has all the components of what the—I'll keep using the term, just to be polite—Fair Elections Act had in it, plus an additional number of sections about foreign influence and other aspects of our voting ecosystem, as it's been referred to. It's bigger and we're going to spend less time on it, which is worrisome to me as a parliamentarian, because we have one job, and it's to try to get legislation right. Whether you agree with it or not, understanding it is proper.

I've always felt and committed... Ruby knows this. There are many Canadians who are very committed and deeply passionate about our democratic processes. They come from all sides of the spectrum. Sometimes they seem to care more than we do, frankly. They want their voices to be input into this. This doesn't belong to us: we're just here for a moment. We are making changes that will last long beyond our careers in this place, and we should be responsible to the people who sent us here.

It's with some regret, but I'll suggest that we crack it next week. We start with what I would say are some of the more obvious witnesses who are available to us. I think we should have a very

short timeline in terms of submitting witnesses to the chair. I was going to suggest noon tomorrow, but that might be a bit aggressive. I'll put it out there, chuck it at the wall, and see if it sticks.

The Chair: Before we continue, why don't we—

Mr. Scott Reid: That is a bit aggressive.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's aggressive, but—

The Chair: Before you continue, why don't we agree on a date for submitting witnesses?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Sure. Then we'll go back to the timing of things. I hesitate only because one imparts on the other, but yes.... Scott reacted, and yes, that is very fast for a committee.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm no longer the shadow minister here, so—

The Chair: Blake, do you have a timeline for submitting witnesses?

Mr. Blake Richards: Obviously, I would say that noon tomorrow is more than ambitious. I think it makes it quite impossible, actually.

The Chair: Could you propose another date?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Maybe I'll modify it this way, just to help out. I think there are some obvious witnesses: Elections Canada, the minister, the Privacy Commissioners, those folks who are both here in Ottawa and notable. Could we perhaps get agreement on that for noon tomorrow and then have a further deadline for some of the more non-obvious witnesses, or witnesses that we could agree to by Sunday or Monday at noon?

An hon. member: It would have to be a weekday.

Mr. Blake Richards: Let me modify that again.

I'm comfortable with the idea of agreeing on the very obvious witnesses. Depending on what we decide today, that would get us a first meeting or two next week, or whatever is required.

If that is what the committee decides to do, then maybe give us until this time next week, say, to have the other witnesses, because with the obvious and agreed-to witnesses, we would have enough to get us started, anyway. That would give everyone time to prepare a proper witness list.

• (1235)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Do you typically go by subcommittee, Chair, in terms of getting through the witnesses? What's this committee's most comfortable process for winnowing down the lists or does it sit with you?

The Chair: We don't usually go to subcommittee because that just adds another stage. We do it here.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): I think we're hearing some agreement here that we can get some of the big witnesses out there right away, as soon as possible—by tomorrow or even the next day. Then, at the beginning of next week, by Sunday, by the end of the day, that night, we could have them submitted to the clerk, and by Monday we're made aware of who the witnesses are that have been submitted by each of the parties. So next week, Monday...?

Mr. Blake Richards: Could you clarify that for me? There are two different lists that we're talking about, obviously. The first one—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Witness lists.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, but there are two different witness lists that we're talking about. There is one where they are the easy, obvious ones.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: For the obvious ones, I think Nathan was saying that we could even do them by tomorrow, but I'm talking about the full.... The full list is what you were saying for next week, Blake, right?

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, exactly.

I was suggesting that for maybe this time next week; I think the end of the weekend is probably too soon. It's a pretty big bill. There are a lot of different subject matters in it, obviously.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: On Tuesday we have a meeting. Maybe at that meeting we're given the witness lists...?

No, we don't have one?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The back row said “no” so I think that might be a no. They look pretty smart.

How about a modification—not to complicate this—where we aim for the three stages? One is the obvious folks for early next week. Ruby's suggestion was shot down, but maybe have an initial draft of lists from the parties, but the witness list invitation stays open until next Friday to accommodate further thoughts. Sometimes what happens, Chair, as you know, is you hear from the minister or the Chief Electoral Officer on a bill like this, and then other witnesses, other ideas come to mind that we hadn't thought of because of the testimony that we hear.

The initial list is the most obvious folks. The second one...by Tuesday or Wednesday of next week. Yet we as a committee agree that there are still additions that we could make by the end of next week to accommodate some of the maybe less obvious ones based on the testimony we hear.

The Chair: Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): I think it's just putting it out there. I like the direction that we're going in. I'd like to have as many witnesses as we can as soon as possible, given what Nathan has discussed in terms of getting this back to the House, and be as thorough as possible.

I'll throw this out immediately. I know the minister is available on Monday after question period, from 3:30 to 4:30. The department officials can be made available, depending on what the committee wants, for an additional hour or two after that, if that can be agreed to right off the bat.

Mr. Scott Reid: To state the obvious, we don't need them on this. Are you suggesting a special meeting?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Yes. There will probably have to be more than one special meeting.

Mr. Blake Richards: Certainly in order to give it a proper study, there probably is going to be a need for something far beyond what we have available to us here in the next couple of weeks. Although I'm comfortable with the idea of doing something like that on a Monday with the minister, I would argue that with a bill of this size the minister should certainly be available for more than one hour at the committee. If we're talking about having a meeting, she should accompany her officials and be available for the entirety of that meeting, because it is a very comprehensive piece of legislation. One hour would essentially allow, in one of the party's cases, seven minutes for them to ask the minister who is responsible for the bill, about a 350-page bill, which to me seems entirely unreasonable. Certainly that should be expanded; I'm comfortable with that.

I think to go beyond that, the idea that we're starting to talk about scheduling this here or that there, we haven't even made a determination as to what this study looks like, its length and size, the amount of time that we're going to give to this. The minister is an obvious one, but to start to go beyond that type of a witness, let's get a sense of what we're talking about here in terms of the scope and length of the study.

I have not heard anything put forward in terms of what we're talking about here other than some backroom chatter that's been out there that the government is really trying to force this through as quickly as they can, and that they want to just do a few meetings and get it over with and hope that no one complains. I can tell them that we are certainly not going to be onside with that, nor certainly are Canadians. I think we need to get a sense of that before we go any further on it.

•(1240)

The Chair: Perhaps we could just finish the thing on the minister because Nathan is still in the middle of his presentation on that whole scope.

Mr. Chris Bittle: In terms of the minister, I appreciate what the Conservatives are bringing forward on this. They are correct that this is a big bill. The counter proposal, which may make more sense and not split the testimony, is to have the minister come immediately with department officials. Make it one hour with the minister and two hours with the officials. Then have the minister come back before clause-by-clause for an additional hour, which provides you with the two hours. Then you can hear from all of the expert witnesses and then question the minister again, and have a bookend during the process.

Mr. Blake Richards: Again, we're starting to try to put the cart before the horse to some degree here as well.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Well, tell us about the horse.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen's got the floor and the horse.

Mr. Blake Richards: Although I appreciate that suggestion, let's get a sense as to what we're talking about here.

I appreciate that Mr. Cullen has the floor, but I'd love to hear what the government's thoughts are on this. They're the ones who are going to make the decision. Mr. Cullen might have a proposal—I don't know—but it's the government who will determine with the votes they have on this committee whether they're going to try to ram this down the throats of the opposition, and therefore Canadians, or whether they're not. I think that will determine a lot of what's acceptable and what's not. If they're going to try to legitimately work to allow there to be proper debate of this....

I mean, we listened in the House of Commons yesterday to the minister when they moved time allocation on this, which, I will point out, they moved notice to do after one hour of debate in the House of Commons. Then we listened over and over throughout the little half hour we got to question the government's move to do this, as the minister claimed that we should let's get this to committee and we can have this great debate, this huge, very full debate on this 350-page piece of legislation.

I want to know whether those words were simply hollow words, as we've heard before from this government, or whether they were actually a legitimate, serious intention to actually have a full and proper debate here in this committee, where we can discuss in detail the 350 pages of the bill and the many changes the bill makes to our elections law. Keep in mind that our elections law is what governs the makeup of the House of Commons. It determines who represents their fellow Canadians in the House of Commons, which therefore makes it probably as important a piece of legislation as we would ever deal with.

We heard these words and this idea that somehow their forcing time allocation and not having debate in the House of Commons.... A number of members of Parliament who wanted to speak to this legislation on behalf of their constituents were denied the opportunity because of that move. The entirety of the response from the Minister of Democratic Institutions was to say, well, they're going to provide that opportunity in committee. I guess the question is this: Will they keep to their word on that, unlike just about everything else they've ever said? Will they allow there to be that proper debate in this committee and allow members of Parliament to dig into the details of this bill, hear from witnesses who can provide us thoughts on that and then question the minister, or will they not?

That will be determining a lot of what we do here. I mean, to start talking about slotting this hour here, and that hour there....

The Chair: Okay. I had interrupted Mr. Cullen to try to get that one point covered. The floor is Mr. Cullen's if he wants it, based on what he's heard so far.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I hear Blake's concerns in terms of the public message or rhetoric matching the actions. Governments always say they want to work with you as they invoke time allocation. Some of my blue team colleagues down the row would know that, too.

I'm just looking for what would work. I hear the offer from Chris with respect to the minister up front and then the minister at the back. It gets to the two hours, except that it may be a middle ground. It seems possible to me that, in some ways, it could be more effective, just in that, by the second time, we will have heard criticisms of the bill, where the holes are, and then we could call the minister back and ask, "Did you think about this? Did you think about that?"

We had early confusion, if you remember, Mr. Chair. It was Scott who was asked to introduce it as the interim minister, so you can forgive it a bit, but even through the technical briefings that some of us—not many—went to, from the public servant side of things, there were major questions that they either didn't have the answers to or gave us incorrect information.

Parties issuing receipts and needing to issue receipts before they could get reimbursed from Elections Canada was a major part of the bill that we asked Scott about. He said, "You can amend it." A few days went by, and then he said, "It's actually in the bill". That type of stuff does not give me as a parliamentarian a huge amount of confidence that this is locked, has been well considered, and is totally airtight. I think we're going to find either by intention or by not paying attention that there are problems with the bill.

I'm still pushing for travel. I understand the tight timelines, but again, my grandmother used to say that a lack of planning on my part did not make for a crisis on her part. As a little kid, I wasn't a great planner.

This is what I was going to propose. We hit the thing hard starting next week. I look at our totals as a way to think about these committee studies. How many hours can you fit in to start to satisfy what would seem like a worthwhile...? Frankly, this has been so late. It's not even going to meet the standard that we took with Bill C-23, the Fair Elections Act. It's not going to meet the same number of hours of study, which, as I have said, is unfortunate, because I think it's a bigger bill than Bill C-23 was. We could argue whether it's as good, more damaging, or whatnot.

We've lost two hours of committee time for next week through other things. If we were to do two hours on the Monday, get an hour on Tuesday, do another two hours either Tuesday or Wednesday, and then get another hour on Thursday, that would give us six, maybe. That would be my proposal for next week. That's the "get the ball rolling" week.

The next week I'm going to propose we travel.

● (1245)

Mr. Blake Richards: Sorry, do you want to just—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Do you want me to be more concrete about it?

Mr. Blake Richards: Give me what you're discussing—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Two on Monday....

Mr. Blake Richards: What you're talking about on Monday would be the time that has been offered with the minister and the officials. Is that what I'm hearing?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, one hour with the a minister and an hour with officials.

I'll start to get really specific, just as a way to throw something out, Mr. Chair, to give us something to talk about, but I'm not wedded to this.

I suggest an hour with the minister and an hour with officials on Monday. We have the first hour lost on Tuesday. We have the second hour with Elections Canada, who should be available, and do a second session either Tuesday evening or Wednesday afternoon. Then we get into some of the other more obvious witnesses, and then a sixth hour—this will be the sixth hour by now—on that second hour on Thursday. The first hour is for the indigenous languages report, and the second hour would be available. That's the first week.

The second week I'm going to suggest we travel, although I have great hesitation. A week of travel in a country the size of Canada... Ruby and I, and others, have done national tours. You can't do the east coast in a week sometimes.

Mr. Scott Reid: We leave, I assume, the Sunday before and arrive back on the Saturday after.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's right.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What date?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The Sunday is June 3. What we've done in the past, Mr. Chair, to maximize the committee's time on the road is this. You are in the province you seek to be in on the Monday morning. You arrive the Sunday night; you start Monday morning. You have either a full day there.... I'm following the ERRE path where we would spend most of the day there. Sometimes you can hit two spots, but that is relatively rare. You then travel the afternoon or evening, arrive in the next place, and do Tuesday. It can be exhaustive—I mean exhausting. It's not going to be exhaustive.

If you pull back and ask what the bare minimum you'd want in terms of the regions, you'd have to say somewhere in the east. You'd have to say Quebec. You'd have to say Ontario. You'd have to say somewhere in the flat part, and then you'd have to say somewhere on the coast. That excludes a ton, because you're going to say no to Saskatchewan and Manitoba or Alberta. You're going to say no to the north.

I would strongly encourage us to consider that we don't just do cities. We have to consider at least one rural area. We fudged it a bit on ERRE. We would stop in Leduc, where the airport is in Edmonton, and call that the rural visit, which for you and me, Mr. Chair, doesn't even come close to counting as rural or remote, but what do you do with logistics, right?

• (1250)

Mr. Scott Reid: I believe you have to go outdoors and smell fresh air to qualify it as rural. Just staying at the airport does not qualify.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: June 4 right through to the Saturday. The committee essentially ends its work on a Friday afternoon, which is June 8, and people make their way.

Aside from the rural, whatever that means to people, we encourage interaction with the first nations communities. The way voting rights are realized within first nations communities, as Cathy and I know, is absolutely different from the majority of Canadians. For some of the changes that are being talked about here in enfranchisement, one of the groups that is typically and often named is the aboriginal people who vote at a much lower rate.

I'll stop there, but I think part of our day should be spent talking to young Canadians. We did this before when we moved a bill about voting age rights. In the afternoon or morning, depending on the travel schedule, we stopped at a high school. The reception and information we got as parliamentarians, as part of that process, was better than the public evening events. For any of us who have ever done high school debates during campaigns, their questions are typically way harder and much better than the public debates. We're in camera, right?

Mr. Scott Reid: Seniors ask tough questions.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Seniors, yes. The two voting ends of the spectrum. Sure, let's say that for the seniors.

That's what I propose. Then to come back, mop up witnesses, the minister, and even though it gives me great hesitation to say this, the committee starts heading to clause-by-clause sometime around June 13, 14, 15 to get it out of committee for that final week of Parliament.

I'm not saying what the government is or isn't going to do, but I don't imagine a scenario in which they're not moving time allocation on this thing at the final stages, because you'll only end up with a maximum of one or two weeks of the House sitting. You're going to do midnight hours but even that won't qualify you if people want to talk. It gets you back in time. We tried to tick both boxes but you can tell I'm not totally thrilled with it. I think we're going to skip off the surface of a lot of conversations. It's our voting rights. We shouldn't be skipping too much.

The Chair: Okay, Chris and then Ms. Sahota.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I want to ask the clerk for the logistics of a week of travel starting on June 4, how that would work, if it's possible.

The Clerk: We would need a budget approved by the liaison subcommittee, and then House authorization before we could do anything.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: How long does that usually take?

The Clerk: It depends on the will of the people involved. It can be done quickly. A request can be made to have the subcommittee on budgets meet.

As far as the logistics are concerned, whatever the committee desires, we'll work to make it happen.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do I have the floor?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I like a lot of Nathan's ideas. I think you can gain a lot of valuable information when you go on the road, coming from the ERRE experience, but—that word always gets me laugh, because of one of the witnesses—I worry about the time constraints we're under, and whether we are going to get it approved.

I agree that we have to hear from youth, seniors organizations, and various important voices that don't usually get heard. I think there may be a way of doing that and not necessarily having to take all that time and go on the road. Through technology and other means we can probably conference in people who would wish to speak on the matter. We could also talk to organizations that have a presence here, like Samara and other organizations that work for voting rights. Disability organizations have come before us. We had a lot of witnesses in the electoral reform process that I think would have a presence in Ottawa. We could speak to them because they do engage with people across the country and collect that information and their thoughts. They could present and I think they would be able to answer a lot of our questions in a good way.

I don't know what your vision is, if we're going to have open public forums where people come to the mike. Are we talking to more professional witnesses or will we have general public discussions? What are your thoughts on that?

• (1255)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I will answer quickly. I think it would be similar. It would be a mix. The two o'clock to four o'clock afternoon session in Edmonton is with academics, the heads of Elections Alberta, just to give you an example, and then the evening becomes more the public's opportunity. I know people appreciated it. Even if it was clipped and even if it was sometimes political, folks saw a House of Commons committee trying to hear from them, as opposed to having just the usual suspects.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think so, but I think we can video conference in, especially if you want to do a remote reserve community. I think that can even be done. One of our bigger open-mike sessions was right here in Ottawa. We got a lot of good feedback, I think, from that session as well. I'm not against doing a session like that per se. In order to get the most input from people within the time constraints we have, I think we can do a lot of it from here and then limit the time in between the flights and travel and all of that and actually have maybe more hours of witness testimony that we can take in.

You proposed having one hour with Elections Canada up front. I think we'll probably need two hours with Elections Canada right up front, because they have some of the most detailed information as to how some of these things in the bill are going to function. I think we're going to need more time with them. In the past they've been excellent as we've tried to figure out recommendations of the CEO.

We've already studied a lot of the stuff that's in this bill.

Nathan, I know you didn't have the advantage of that, not having been a member of this committee, but for all of the other members here, 85% of what's in this bill has already been studied by this committee for months on end with Elections Canada in the room. We were able to benefit from asking all the questions we had on

everything, back and forth, and they were able to go back, do some research, and tell us how they would implement a lot of these changes.

There was a lot of great feedback and we gained knowledge through that process. I think a lot of that is done. Don't take me wrong—I'm not saying that we don't still have to go through it thoroughly at this point, but in order to leave more time to do the clause-by-clause, I think we could make more effective use of our time and do it here through video conferencing, and still have engagement.

The Chair: Ms. Tassi.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I'm looking at the time. In the interest of time, I'm sensing agreement that we want to hear from the minister and that we want to hear from Elections Canada. If Monday we can get the minister and Elections Canada and confirm that we have agreement on that, we can start with that. I want to make sure before we proceed that we're all in agreement with that, so that we can make that happen and then continue with the discussion.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We can do a two-hour or three-hour meeting.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We can have a two-hour or three-hour meeting, the first hour with the minister and then two hours with Elections Canada, and then maybe bring the minister back in order to deal with Blake's point. I think you're right that we do need more time, but I think we'll learn so much through the process that at the end we could bring her back and we could ask more effective questions.

The Chair: That's on Monday, right?

Mr. Blake Richards: What's your proposal exactly for Monday?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'm saying three hours.

The Chair: That would be starting at what time?

Ms. Filomena Tassi: It would be from 3:30 to 4:30 with either departmental officials or Elections Canada. We know we have work to do here, and I'd like to get going on the work, so we can commit to having the minister on Monday from 3:30 to 4:30 if the minister is available, and then have either departmental officials or officials from Elections Canada from 4:30 to 6:30, but we should fill the slot with the people we know we want to hear from to get going.

• (1300)

Mr. Blake Richards: I think I'm hearing a few different things. Let's be clear on what we are doing. From 3:30 to 4:30 it would be the minister and then what? I've heard Elections Canada and I've heard departmental officials.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It would be Elections Canada for two hours on that same day. Sorry, I mean departmental officials.

Mr. Scott Reid: Departmental officials are Elections Canada officials.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes, you're right.

The Chair: Privy Council officers are departmental officials for this department.

Mr. Blake Richards: Are you talking about 3:30 to 4:30 with the minister and the departmental officials from 4:30 to 6:30?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Then we would have Elections Canada come as well. Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: So from 3:30 to 4:30 you're talking to the minister, and from 4:30 to 6:30 it is departmental officials.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes. I think that makes sense.

The Chair: Is that okay with everyone for Monday?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Then we'll have Elections Canada as well, because we need them too.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: If you want to stretch it on that day, if we can, we could ask the Elections Canada officials to come after that on the same day, if we feel we're up to that. We have to work hard on this; we know that.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We have to have Elections Canada, for sure—

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I'm proposing that we do 3:30 to 4:30 with the minister, 4:30 to 6:30 with the department officials, and 6:30 to 8:30 if we can get Elections Canada officials here to do that.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: We don't want Elections Canada officials. We want the Chief Electoral Officer. I think that's what you meant.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Okay.

Mr. Scott Reid: But it would be with whichever people he chose to bring with him.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: I think we have to be fair about this. We—"we" meaning the PS—consulted with the minister about her availability. We have not done the same thing. Obviously, this would be high priority for the CEO, but we ought to actually confirm that this is the ideal time from his point of view.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: He's still applying for the job. I'm sure he'll show up.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Reid: He'll do whatever he wants, but essentially he wants to provide us with the best information he can. I don't know; he may say yes.

The Chair: So it's Filomena's proposal: if he's available.

Mr. Scott Reid: If not, it could be at his earliest availability or something like that.

The Chair: Yes.

Okay?

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. I understand we're out of time, so we'll probably need to continue this conversation, but obviously the other thing that still remains is dealing with the motion that I'd put forward. That is a very time-sensitive matter, with June 7 being our deadline, and we'd still have to hear from the minister as well.

Could we begin that second hour on Tuesday by discussing my motion so that we could make a decision about that?

The Chair: The second hour on Tuesday is blank, so we could.

Mr. Blake Richards: Then we can carry on with this discussion once we've dealt with that.

The Chair: We can continue on the schedule for this study.

Mr. Blake Richards: By then we would have some preliminary witness lists and things like that, right?

The Chair: Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We've agreed to process in terms of submitting witness lists.

The Chair: Yes. Remind me what dates we agreed to.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We had talked about it. We have the initial lists already confirmed, it seems. Tuesday would be the submission for the more exhaustive list.

Mr. Blake Richards: Preliminary.

The Chair: The preliminary exhaustive list.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, the preliminarily exhausting list—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —and then it remains technically open until Friday.

The Chair: Until noon Friday.

Are people in agreement with that?

The biggest part of the list will be in by Tuesday, and if there are any straggler things you want to add, you have until noon Friday.

Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: One big logistical element is that if travel is going to be on the table, I believe the liaison committee meets on Tuesday, so I don't think that's a discussion that can wait until Tuesday afternoon.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm not sure we need 120 minutes with department officials. Could I suggest we do 30 minutes on that on Monday?

•(1305)

Mr. Scott Reid: You're saying 30 minutes with officials?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No, 30 minutes to discuss travel.

Essentially, we'd do an hour with the minister, an hour and a half with PCO officials, and 30 minutes on what we'll call future committee business, which is essentially talking about travel and the rest of the study schedule.

It would be good to get a sense from the government, either publicly or privately, as to what deadline you're working toward on clause-by-clause and what you're hoping for on getting the bill back to the House, because I still don't have that sense.

The Chair: You had proposed clause-by-clause by roughly the 13th?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: [*Inaudible—Editor*] is the deadline.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Say that again? We have so many elements that have been put on the table now.

The Chair: The travel week was until June 8, so that would give us two days for all the witnesses.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No, similar to what we're doing next week, my assumption was that we would be tacking on meetings throughout the week.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It would be either the week of June 4, if we're not travelling, or the week of June 11, if we do travel, maybe both.

The Chair: Okay.

The proposal on the table is Monday, one hour with the minister, an hour and a half with the Privy Council, which is the departmental officials, and half an hour to finish the discussion of the timetable for the rest of the schedule, which would get us to liaison committee in time for their Tuesday meeting to make the request, if we so decide that.

Mr. Scott Reid: I didn't disagree with anything you just said, Mr. Chair, but I have to say that in this case, I'm having some trouble seeing the value of travel. I get the value for the electoral reform committee, which Nathan and I were both on, along with other long-

suffering people from the committee. Ruby was there. It's all a blur now.

That had a value, but I'm not sure I see it in this case. If time is the issue, I think we would be better off being here and trying to arrange teleconference meetings with people. We could do more of it and spend less time in the air. That's where a very substantial proportion of our time will be spent if we're jetting around the country.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We'll talk Monday.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's just an observation.

The Chair: We can repeat that point on Monday in the half hour.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes. Let's have this discussion at the time we've now arranged for it. We are past our time here.

The Chair: There's one thing I forgot.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Chair, I think you forgot the 6:30 to 8:30 CEO meeting.

The Chair: Yes, I forgot the 6:30 to 8:30 meeting on Monday with the Chief Electoral Officer and his officials, if he's available.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The other option is.... Well, we're doing Blake's the second half of Tuesday, right?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, we can do that if they're available.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: If not, is the committee open to Tuesday evening?

The Chair: It would be Tuesday evening for Elections Canada if they're not available Monday.

Mr. Blake Richards: Obviously, as you've said, Nathan, I'm fairly certain they will make themselves available. If that comes up, the chair has some discretion to deal with that, although I can't imagine them saying they won't make themselves available.

The Chair: Okay, I think we're all good and all set.

Very good work, guys. This was very impressive.

The meeting is adjourned.

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