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CANADA

# **Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, June 13, 2019**

—  
**Chair**

**The Honourable Larry Bagnell**



## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Thursday, June 13, 2019

• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)):** Good morning. Welcome to the 162nd meeting of the standing committee. Although it says we're in camera, we won't be for a few minutes because we have to do just one thing first.

I'll read the notes from the clerk. They say, "The committee would like to thank the best clerk in the history of the House of Commons"—

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

**The Chair:**—"and the best researchers."

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** Those are good notes. Thank you.

Actually, what I'd like to do is this. We have a cake here to present which says on it, "Happy Retirement from Filibustering to the Great Parliamentarian from Hamilton Centre."

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** Yes, you can take pictures.

I'll take requests to speak.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.):** Chair, I move that we put the recipe in the Hansard.

**The Chair:** There are pictures.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** That is amazing. Who arranged for that? Thank you so much.

**An hon. member:** You're famous.

**An hon. member:** Is it bilingual?

**The Chair:** Oh, yes, we can't present this: It's not bilingual.

**An hon. member:** It should be in braille too.

**An hon. member:** Hey, David, if you want to share that cake, it has to be in two languages.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I wonder how much sugar is in it.

**Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.):** You deserve it. You impress me, you know that?

**Mr. David Christopherson:** You're very kind.

Listen, thank you to whoever did this. I'm blown away.

**The Chair:** So it goes without saying—and I'll get a speaking list here—that obviously you're a very passionate member. I think you've been very principled. Each of us, in theory, should have one-tenth of the influence on this committee, but I think that's not true. I think you have more than your one-tenth of influence on this committee. There's making a point and there's making a point, and you can certainly make a point very passionately, and although members might often disagree, we think the points you're making are principled—I do, anyway. You believe in them and you're a great asset to this Parliament, and I know there are some people who will add to my comments.

Mr. Bittle.

**Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.):** Thank you so much.

When I was appointed deputy House leader, they told me I was on PROC and the only thing I knew about PROC was the filibuster that had happened, and I wasn't looking forward to it.

I came to my first meeting and I had an idea about something, and immediately Mr. Christopherson said, "Oh, the parliamentary secretary came and he's imposing his will on committee," and I thought, "Oh, my God, what have I gotten myself into accepting this position and coming down here, and how are we going to do this going forward?"

But over the past couple of years, I have been just amazed and have incredible respect for what you do for your constituents and our country. The residents of Hamilton are incredibly fortunate to have someone as passionate and with such great integrity as you. We can disagree with you, but no one can question the integrity with which you raise and bring forward your points, and that you fervently believe in what you bring forward. Without any level of bullshit, you get straight to the point. I had to use swearing in this, and Hamilton can appreciate that.

I'll speak for myself and say that I'm fortunate enough to have a mentor in Jim Bradley. He may not be as loud, but I think he brings that same level of commitment to the point that you'd better not stand between me and my constituents, because you're going to have to go through me. It's something I strive to do, and I appreciate seeing it in this place. You will be incredibly missed in this chamber by all sides of the House.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

•(1105)

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC):** First of all, I was given seven or eight minutes' notice that I'd be doing this, which puts me in mind of Gladstone's famous comment that if he were given a month to prepare a speech, he could deliver a five-minute speech; if he were given a week, he could deliver a 20-minute speech; if he is told immediately beforehand, it could take hours for him to get to his point.

Nonetheless, I do want to say this. First of all, David is a colleague who, as we all know, gets directly to the point, but then can persist in making that point for a very long time.

It's been a pleasure, David, a real pleasure working with you. Other members won't know this, but I have been pestering him about where he is going to live in retirement, because I am hoping to have a chance to hang out, have a beer on his dock, just chat and enjoy the company of a really remarkable colleague.

I did have enough time to ask a few other colleagues about you. I mentioned to them, of course, the fact that you started in municipal politics, and after a successful elected career there, went on to provincial politics, and then from there to federal politics. I asked what people thought of that, and some of my Conservative colleagues thought that it shows you are persistent and determined. I also heard the suggestion that it shows that you are multi-talented. The one I thought was most fitting was the observation that you're just a slow learner.

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

**Mr. Scott Reid:** You are retiring now, which shows that you've finally learned that it's worth spending as much time as possible with family—something we'll all learn sooner or later. I do hope you get to share some of that retirement time with us, and with me in particular.

Thank you.

**Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I'll echo what Mr. Reid has said, but I want to say as well that it's been a privilege sitting next to you and that I've had the honour—usually Scott sits here—of sitting between two distinguished parliamentarians who actually know what they're talking about, what this committee is about and what's being done.

Being the new guy on the committee and a rookie, it's been great to hear your observations, comments and experience, as well.

I say this truthfully: You will be missed, and I hope you'll be sitting at that table from time to time, perhaps in the next Parliament, when we need some expertise from the wisdom of the past.

I wish you very well, David. We appreciate all you've done.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Thanks, John. I know that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** It's good that I am here today, being someone who has shadowed this fine gentleman in Hamilton for some 14 years now. Of course, he predates me by many years.

Let me say this. There are some things that are consistent about David Christopherson. One of them is that he usually does not need a microphone to make his point. Secondly, no one in Hamilton ever wants to follow him on the platform after he has spoken.

I'll tell you, for 14 years, there has never been a partisan word from him, publicly, about me. I hope that I have kept that end of it as well. In fact, on many occasions, Mr. Christopherson has actually stood in front of audiences and commended me, so he is a parliamentarian who understands that, yes, we have to fight vociferously over policies that we sometimes profoundly disagree about, but we're all still human. We all still go home, have issues and wish to try to be dignified and decent human beings together.

That's what is most impressive to me about David Christopherson, and I see in him at home and in his actions in that regard.

His public service has always been like that. I have talked to those who have worked with him on council and who also, apparently, profoundly disagreed with him on many issues, but are still his friends, because of the way he dealt with them personally.

Knowing that, there is one thing that David has repeated to me. He said, "When we're on the ground here, it's about supporting our community—supporting Hamilton." He's lived by that for all the time I've known him.

•(1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Graham.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** The first time I encountered David was when I was working for a guy you might have heard of, Scott Simms, on the public accounts committee, where we served very briefly. My observation, because David Christopherson was the chair at the time, was that he was the first chair I had ever encountered who could filibuster his own committee.

I have learned a lot from you, David, and it's been quite fun, because on our first day here—as I have said in the past—we had a fairly tense exchange in our very first interaction, so I thought, "Okay, that's a good start."

I do want to express some concern that when you leave, whoever replaces you from the NDP on this committee—or if it's multiple people; we'll see—will have your values in making sure that this committee can work in a non-partisan way. There are people in this place, in all parties, who are ruthlessly partisan, in a completely inappropriate way, and you're not.

We've been able to function because I think, on all sides, we have that here. I just want to say how much I appreciate that and how much I learned from you over the last four years of working with you.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Simms.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.):** He doesn't predate me, I can tell you that. In 2004, my friend, it was the Paul Martin minority government, and I went from government to opposition to third party and back to government. That's one thing I've got on you—

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

**Mr. Scott Simms:**—that I've been all around the circle.

There's an old joke in Newfoundland where a Newfoundlander and, I'll say, a Hamiltonian were in the woods one day and a big grizzly bear walked out and growled and showed his teeth. The Newfoundlander bent over and started tying up his shoe and the Hamiltonian asked, "You don't think you're going to outrun that bear, do you?" The Newfoundlander says, "No, I just just have to outrun you."

The reason I bring up that story is that this is the type of business where we mark our own personal performance by the marching of others. On many occasions I find myself giving my interventions that, one, are at least understood by all and, two, using a cadence that will keep everyone's attention—at least for a short period, until I get my main point out.

David did that with such absolutely astonishing ease. He made it seem so easy. The best professional athletes make their profession look easy, and David does that. He makes this profession look easy, but it's not easy. I've seen him on television and in the House and certainly at committee, and it's the passion that he brings from the grassroots to here. I say "grassroots" in the strictly political sense, from the municipal level to the provincial and now federal level.

I think the past few weeks are a good way to summarize his opinion about how this place should work, because I have noticed with a great deal of angst that what has really driven him to a point of anger, which I didn't see before, was the idea of a dissenting report. Dissension was starting to get under David's skin, and it's still there perhaps. Whether or not we have a dissenting report, I think is a testament to how he wants us all to get along or, as he likes to say, "come along".

Anyway, David, you will be missed. I had a card for you here.

**A Voice:** No. We're working on it.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Oh, you're working on it. All right.

**A Voice:** A family card.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** We're working on a card. All the best, my friend.

I suspect you will not be with title, but certainly with opinion, and one that I hope you never extinguish. David, all the best.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Scott.

Before I go to Ruby, I also appreciate the passion with which you continue to make the point that the security of Parliament shouldn't be in the hands of the government. It's a very substantial point. Thank you for that.

Now we'll go to Ruby.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wish I could say I've had as many terms and as much history with you, Mr. Christopherson. My time with you has been short, but it has been very sweet. It has just been this one term. I really wish you would stay longer, so I could have many more terms of

experience with you, because my term on this committee has definitely been very enjoyable.

I've learned a lot. You definitely scared me on the first day. I thought what am I doing here? What is happening? After that initial shock wore off, I could see that the words that you speak always come from a place of truth and with a lot of integrity. I have a lot of respect for you. I don't think you'll ever understand the impact that experienced members have on newer members. We walk in your footsteps, and it's nice to see that we can have mentors on different sides of the aisle. Thank you for helping all the junior members along the way this first term.

You'll always be remembered in this place. I hope we're able to live up to always speaking our mind no matter what the circumstances, and feeling good about ourselves at the end of the day. I'm sure you have no problem sleeping at night because you have always made your position clear. I think that's really important and people respect a politician who comes to this place and does not forget the people who brought them here and what they believe.

●(1115)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Linda Lapointe:** I'll now add a bit of French to this discussion.

[*English*]

That's good for you. You will miss that in Hamilton, the French.

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

[*Translation*]

You may recall that I first met you at a meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence, when I was replacing a colleague. At that time, I was impressed by how you promoted your ideas, but above all by your understanding of the issues. Obviously, you knew how to advocate for your interests and argue.

When I joined the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in September—I was the last member appointed—you impressed me once again. We were studying Bill C-76, and I had the impression that I was taking a course on filibustering. You certainly promote and debate your ideas with conviction, and you deserve full credit for it.

As Ms. Sahota said, we learn a great deal from observing our more experienced colleagues and from never losing sight of our objectives and the interests of our constituents.

Thank you.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Graham.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** I wanted to ask Mr. Christopherson, and perhaps Mr. Simms if I could ask him.... We talked about your progression from the municipal level to the provincial and federal levels, which begs the question: What's next? Is it the UN or the CSA?

**Mr. David Christopherson:** It's not the Senate.

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

**Mr. David Christopherson:** When I speak, I'll discuss that.

**The Chair:** Can I have permission from the committee to go a few minutes into the bells?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** David, you've been to Centre Block as much as anybody. Is there not a delay?

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** It's a delay of about one and a half to two seconds.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** So it's nothing essential, okay. It's very handy having this. Now we can gauge with greater accuracy for getting up there.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** It's always there, but it's not on.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Wasn't it in our old digs over at 112 north? There was an old TV there, wasn't there?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Lauzon):** There are two TVs on the top of the cabinet.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** [*Inaudible—Editor*] said that we should look at what we should do the next time.

**Mr. John Nater:** We won't be there, I think. That's my understanding.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** We won't, or they won't?

**Mr. John Nater:** In theory the room itself won't be there.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** The room itself will be disassembled and replaced with something.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** It could be a supply closet.

**Mr. John Nater:** Only the heritage rooms will be 100% preserved.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** That somewhat, to some degree, was developing into a heritage room. In the woodwork, it had those carved insignia of the various services. It was on its way to becoming a—

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** That's why it had the hop leaves and grapes. It was the bar.

• (1120)

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Is that right? That was the bar? Is that for real?

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** That's why there were grapes and hop leaves as a border around the top of the room.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** We have good conversations in this committee.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I remember grapes, for sure. I don't remember the grape leaves, but okay.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** You had to look up a little higher.

**Mr. David Sweet:** In the previous Parliament, I chaired the veterans affairs committee, and we dedicated 112 north to the Canadian veterans. That's why we had the parliamentary carver do all the symbols on the walls for all of the branches of the armed forces to honour them. There was quite the fanfare with the Speaker, etc., to dedicate that room, and our hope was that it would be retained as a memorial to our veterans.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** That's the kind of thing that you wouldn't be aware, David, but we passed a resolution in this committee. It was reported in the House, but it hasn't been adopted yet though, has it?

**The Chair:** Which one?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** On Centre Block.

**The Chair:** No, and in fact maybe you should speak to your House leader, if we can get consent to do that.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** You should ask again, then. I think you would find you'd have consent.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Before I do I would like to expose the.... I hope you take it in a lighthearted way, but we asked our spokesperson to be the front of our presentation to you and this card. If a spokesperson would like to—

**The Chair:** Kevin Lamoureux.

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

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** We thought we'd come full circle. That was the first day.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Kevin does present a challenge to the photographers of Canada.

**The Chair:** Every committee member, obviously, has given commendations, which, in itself, is a testimony because everyone had great commendations.

I would give you the opportunity to respond, Mr. Christopherson. Do you have any last words for Parliament? But it's not a filibuster.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** “Goodbye” would be the end of the sentence.

You almost have me speechless, which is quite the accomplishment. I'm blown away. I just confess that, for all the passion I bring to the issues, I don't handle emotional issues real good. This just overwhelms me. Nothing means more to me than words like you've given today, words from colleagues who walk in the same shoes. No matter how close you are, it's not until you've walked in those shoes and know what it's like to be a parliamentarian that you fully understand, when fellow parliamentarians compliment you, what it means, especially when they're people you respect.

I've been blessed, especially this last Parliament, with being on two committees whose mandates I thoroughly enjoy: public accounts and PROC. It's also given me an opportunity to spend time with some of the finest parliamentarians that I've met. The hardest thing for us to do is to climb past partisanship, yet it's the critical part where we actually make a difference, where we find a way to move forward for the country—that ability to set that aside. I'm guilty of not doing it all the time, too, because our passions do drive us, but at the end of the day, that ability means everything.

With the people I've been able to serve with, the two chairs that I've served under—you, Mr. Larry Bagnell, and Mr. Kevin Sorenson.... I've been blessed with fantastic chairs who were only interested in the best for Parliament and Canada.

I thank all of you.

I thank my fellow Hamiltonian, David Sweet. We know that nobody gets up every day and says, “What can I do for Hamilton”, unless they're Hamiltonians themselves. I've always believed that when we're on home turf, it's important for those of us from different parties to make their city the priority and that we, as much as possible, come here and have a united front on the issues that matter. When we disagree, we do it respectfully. If we're going to have a knock-down, drag-'em-out fight, we do it here in the context of Parliament. However, when we go home, we're home, and we treat each other with respect. That means a lot.

I can't address everyone individually, as I know that I don't have enough time, but, Mr. Reid, definitely you'll be the first invitation to that dock, and I'll have a cold one ready for you, sir.

There are a number of people who I'm looking forward to continuing to work with.

I'll just also mention that on the issue of parliament's security that matters to us, Mr. Blaney today, who was the minister at the time, just stopped by me after our public accounts committee—I don't think I'm telling tales out of school; I hope not—and said to me, “Look, you need to understand that, at the time, we were under a lot of pressure. There were a lot of crises. I think we made the wrong decision. I think we made a mistake. I want you to know that if I'm here in the next Parliament, I'm committed to changing that and putting it back to the way it should be.”

I know that people like Mr. Graham and others care about that, and that's a good sign. It means a lot because it's the way Parliament should run.

Just to end, I was asked if I'm going to still be around. Yes. It turns out that sitting around on the public accounts committee for 15 years suddenly qualifies you as an expert. There are people around the world who would like me to come and do some work with their public accounts committees and their auditor general systems, and I'm now on the board of directors of the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation. It's the main non-profit NGO that we use at the public accounts committee for their expertise and assistance. I'll be joining their team and travelling. So, I'll be continuing to do that. Hopefully it's not more than half time. I still want to put my feet up for the other half. I'm tired: I've been working for 50 years, and that's sufficient.

Those are my plans going forward. However, I'm also aware that plans, like war plans, change. The first thing that goes out the window when the war starts is the plan, so we'll see what actually happens.

What I would like to do, if you'll allow me, is... This is very difficult. You guys have really, really thrown me for a loop. What's interesting is... You mentioned the filibuster, and a lot of you have commented on the non-partisanship. I have a present that speaks to both those issues. It speaks to the filibuster, but it also speaks to non-partisanship and extends beyond us as parliamentarians.

You all know Tyler Crosby, who is without question, in my view, the most amazing staff person on the Hill, bar none. You often see me talking to him. He's my right hand. I couldn't do this job without

him, at least not the way I'd like to. However, he's not always there. Sometimes he nips out to get something, and then I have nobody else. It's just me here, right?

• (1125)

Yet, when we were in a filibuster, when it was time to unite and fight the good fight, those lines didn't matter, and the partisanship didn't matter.

The Hill Times actually had a picture. I'll just read the outline that goes with it. It says, “NDP MP David Christopherson consults with an opposition staffer ahead of resuming the filibuster at the House Affairs Committee on April 5. He alone spoke eight hours in all that day, and for another four hours on April 6.” The other person in that picture is Kelly Williams.

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

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I want to present to Kelly a frame of that picture as an indication of the way that we can be non-partisan not only as politicians but as staffers.

I thank you for the unpaid work that you did for me. You assisted me to do what I did.

With that, colleagues, there aren't enough words to properly say what this has meant to me. This will stay with me forever. You really touched me in a way that I can't express, and I thank you very much. It means everything to me.

**The Chair:** Does the committee want to do any work on the reason we're here, or do you want to go to the vote?

**Scott Reid:** Do we have to go to the vote if we adjourn, or can we have some cake?

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** We should suspend.

**The Chair:** You want to suspend?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Suspending is a better idea. You're right.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** We can suspend for awhile.

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll suspend, and then we'll come back in camera and hold our discussion. We'll have cake now.

Is that okay? Anything else? Good.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1125)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1135)

**The Chair:** Welcome back to the 162nd meeting. For the first time, Kevin's been allowed in the room by David Christopherson without David blasting him.

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

**The Chair:** Mr. Lamoureux, every member of the committee has said nice things about David, so we invite you to add to the record before we go to vote.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. I understand you said this was the 162th meeting. I can honestly say that I think I was there for the first three, and then I had this wonderful experience. David and I have gotten to know each other over the years, and I've always seen him to be a very strong, powerful advocate for democracy in many different ways. And, can he ever filibuster. I learned that a number of years ago, and I trust that my colleagues who are on the PROC committee were able to witness how David has that art, and he exercises it exceptionally well.

David, I think, partisanship aside, that you will indeed be missed, as you are a great parliamentarian. I always like to consider myself first and foremost a parliamentarian, and I see you as a peer, as someone who has contributed immensely not only to this committee but also on the floor of the House of Commons. I just want to wish you and your wife the very best in the years ahead. For some reason I don't think we've heard or seen the last of you, but now that David is leaving the House, who knows? Maybe if am the PS next go-round, I might actually return. I haven't missed my absence, I must say that. I rather enjoyed the proceedings of the House. But I do wish you, on a personal note, the very best in the years to come.

Thank you very much, and thank you for allowing me to be here.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Before we go back in there, I have a motion.

**The Chair:** Mr. Reid.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** With respect to Mr. Christopherson, be it resolved that he's a jolly good fellow, which nobody can deny.

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

**The Chair:** All in favour?

**A voice:** I don't know if David heard the motion.

**The Chair:** Did you hear the motion, David?

**Mr. David Christopherson:** No, I didn't. No.

**The Chair:** Oh, you didn't vote for it yet.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** It's just resolved, with regard to Mr. Christopherson, that he's a jolly good fellow, which nobody can deny.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Oh, wow. I've now achieved it. There's the phone call.

**The Chair:** Passed unanimously.

We are suspended again.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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