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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 001

Thursday, October 15, 2020

Chair: Mrs. Kelly Block



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• (1100)

[*English*]

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

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

[*Translation*]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

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

[*English*]

I am ready to receive motions for the chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): I nominate Ms. Kelly Block.

[*English*]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Monsieur Berthold that Kelly Block be elected as the chair.

[*Translation*]

Are there any further motions?

[*English*]

Seeing none, is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Ms. Kelly Block duly elected as the chair of the committee.

I invite Ms. Block to take the chair.

The Chair (Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC)): Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. I certainly appreciate the confidence of this committee in me to serve as your chair. I want to welcome you all to the public accounts committee, and I look forward to working with all of you.

I know this is an organizational meeting, so I think the next order of business is to elect our first vice-chair. I would entertain a motion for vice-chair.

The Clerk: Ms. Block, normally the clerk would carry out the election of the vice-chairs, if it's not presumptuous of me.

The Chair: No, not at all.

The Clerk: Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Clerk, I would like to nominate Mr. Greg Fergus.

[*English*]

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Clerk, I'd like to propose Mr. Lloyd Longfield.

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Madam Chair, I'd like to second Mr. Blois's motion.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank my dear colleague Mr. Blanchette-Joncas for his confidence, it is very nice of him, but Mr. Longfield is much better suited for this position.

The Clerk: Thank you.

Mr. Berthold, would you like to withdraw your motion or would you like a vote?

Mr. Luc Berthold: I did not move a motion, Madam Clerk.

The Clerk: Didn't you move the motion to nominate Mr. Fergus?

Mr. Luc Berthold: It wasn't me, but Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: It was me, Madam Clerk.

The Clerk: I apologize, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas. You appear one under the other on my screen.

Would you like to withdraw your motion or would you like to vote on it?

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Fergus, I understand that you are declining my nomination. I will therefore withdraw my motion.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion that Monsieur Longfield be named the first vice-chair?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Excellent. I declare the motion carried and Monsieur Longfield as the duly elected first vice-chair.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you to my buddies. Now I have my speech—no, no, that's okay.

The Clerk: I'll now proceed to the election of the second vice-chair.

[*Translation*]

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

I am now prepared to receive motions for the second vice-chair.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I nominate Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

[*English*]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Monsieur Berthold that Monsieur Blanchette-Joncas be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I accept with pleasure, Madam Clerk.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Are there any further motions?

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Excellent. I declare the motion carried and Monsieur Blanchette-Joncas duly elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

Now, Madam Chair, would you take the reins of the meeting.

The Chair: Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Madam Chair, I'd like to move that we adopt the routine motions that we adopted in the last session.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Longfield.

Do you want to adopt them in their entirety as one motion, or would you like to go through each motion as it is presented?

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I'd put it on the floor that we could do them all at the same time, unless the committee wants to go through one by one, and I am prepared to do that as well.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): I propose that, in keeping with the practices of the other committees, we go one by one so that we can make necessary adjustments as they come up.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Longfield, Mr. Green is proposing a different process from what you moved.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: That's fine.

The Chair: Okay, so we will move forward by consensus to go one by one.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Green just wants me to do some work. That is okay. We have some reading to do. The first motion reads as follows:

That the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We're on number two.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next reads:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five members, namely the Chair and one member from each recognized party; and that the subcommittee work in a spirit of collaboration.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next is:

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive and publish evidence when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including two members from the opposition and two members from the government; and that in the case of previously scheduled meetings taking place outside of the Parliamentary Precinct, the committee members in attendance be required to wait for 15 minutes following the designated start of the meeting before they may proceed to hear witnesses and receive evidence, regardless of whether opposition or government members are present.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Yes, Matthew.

Mr. Matthew Green: I just want to make sure that it reads "that at least four members are present, including two members of the opposition and two members from the government", just for clarity.

The Chair: Yes, it does.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next motion reads:

That witnesses be given ten minutes for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six minutes for the first questioner of each party as follows: Round 1: Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party;

For the second and subsequent rounds, the order and time for questioning be as follows: Conservative Party, five minutes, Liberal Party, five minutes, Conservative Party, five minutes, Liberal Party, five minutes, Bloc Québécois, two and a half minutes, New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes.

Mr. Matthew Green: I have a point of order.

The co-host has stopped my video, and I'm not sure why.

The Chair: All right.

There we go; it's there now.

Mr. Matthew Green: Would you also please put me on the speaking list for this? The timing of my video stopping was rather unfortunate.

The Chair: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

I'd like to move an amendment:

That witnesses be given five (5) minutes for the opening statements; that whenever possible, witnesses provide the committee with their opening statements 72 hours in advance; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of the witnesses, there be allocated six (6) minutes for the first questioner of each party, as follows: Round 1: Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party.

For the second and subsequent rounds, the order and time for questioning be as follows: Conservative Party, five (5) minutes; Liberal Party, five (5) minutes; Bloc Québécois, two and a half (2.5) minutes; New Democratic Party, two and a half (2.5) minutes; Conservative Party, five (5) minutes; Liberal Party, five (5) minutes.

• (1110)

The Chair: Are there any other members who would like to speak to this amendment? Seeing none, we will vote.

Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Hello.

I would like a clarification on how the committee operates. Let's take the example of the appearance of the Auditor General. I imagine that, at the discretion of the chair, we may decide by consensus to give him more time to make his initial presentation.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: Of course. That would be my spirit and intent.

The Chair: Mr. Berthold, thank you for that clarification.

Is there any other discussion on the amendment?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Could MP Green please repeat the words in regard to the 72 hours?

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

They read, "That...witnesses provide the committee with their opening statements 72 hours in advance".

If need be, for the operation of other committees, we found that by having these statements in advance, the witnesses could provide extended statements, which offset the need for them to have more time, rather than having them come in at 10 minutes, off the cuff.

Quite frankly, it also ensures that we have the proper translations in advance for our French colleagues; or if they're francophones, then English translations in advance.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other comments or questions?

Again, just to clarify, the amendment would change the length of 10 minutes for opening statements to five, that we would require their opening remarks 72 hours in advance, and that we would change the order of the questioners for the second round.

Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Chair, through you to Mr. Green, I would like to ask a question.

I have been supportive of this amendment. I just want to make sure that this 72-hour requirement is best practices but we wouldn't refuse somebody to give an opening statement if they didn't meet that requirement.

Mr. Matthew Green: No, I don't think that would be the spirit or intent, but we want to encourage people to come prepared and to provide translated documents for everybody.

Mr. Greg Fergus: It makes it a lot easier for us to follow the remarks as well.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: I'm going to start raising my hand in the "participants" function.

Chair, through you to Mr. Green, thank you.

In committees' past practices, sometimes you don't invite witnesses until a day or two before. Sometimes that's just the nature of the parliamentary calendar and committee schedule.

If that is the spirit, if it's possible to provide written correspondence 72 hours in advance, that would be great. It's not a requirement, but only if possible. In that spirit I'm supportive of the amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

It may help some of my Liberal friends across the way to know that it was in fact the Liberals who put this initially in PROC. I know there was a lot of discussion and debate there, but we're just following that best practice that was laid out by our friends in the Liberal caucus.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Green.

Is there any further discussion on this amendment? If not, we will vote on it.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now I believe we need to vote on the motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you.

• (1115)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

We will move on to the next motion, which reads:

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the committee only when the documents are available in both official languages and that witnesses be advised accordingly.

The Chair: Is there any discussion? There is none.

I see that everyone is in favour of that motion.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next one reads:

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

The Chair: Will those meals be provided here in the riding?

Mr. Matthew Green: If I could, Madam Chair...

The Chair: Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: This was also discussed. The conversation was brought up with very sound critiques, given COVID and the hybrid scenario that we're in. I think where we landed or what made the most sense was that we put in that caveat for people who are in town for in-person meetings, otherwise, for obvious reasons, we wouldn't want to have food ordered for a room that was unattended. Knowing how literally some of this stuff plays out, once it's moved and carried, I just want to make sure that we're clear that this is for in-person meetings only upon the RSVP of members.

The Chair: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Green.

Are there any other comments?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Great.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next reads:

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two representatives per organization; provided that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the chair.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next reads:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to have one staff person at an in camera meeting and that one additional person from each House officer's office be allowed to be present.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I was raising my hand to say something.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Berthold, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I just want to find out how our employees can access Zoom committee meetings. Can they log on directly to hear what is being said simultaneously and without delay, so they can give us good advice? On ParlVU, there is always a time lag. I'd like to know what the situation is. I've asked the clerk, and I've been told that there are phone numbers to call to listen to the meeting, but it's difficult to follow the meeting live.

I want to know what the committee's position is with regard to our assistants.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Clerk, would you be able to speak to the logistics of what Mr. Berthold has raised?

The Clerk: Certainly. It's my understanding that the member can have one member from their office present at the in camera Zoom meeting. Also, the telephone numbers we provide during regular meetings give them real-time access, so it's not like ParlVU. They should be hearing us as we speak.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Clerk.

Are there any further comments?

Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Again, I think maybe I should turn to our staffers, but I always thought that even in in camera meetings held by phone, there was a slight delay, a seven-second delay or some-

thing. I just invented the number, but it's more than just one or two seconds.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I'm sorry to interrupt, but my understanding is that not everybody can hear the discussion we're having right now. The people who are remote are having trouble. This illustrates Mr. Berthold's point that sometimes when you're attending remotely, the audio does not work.

Could the technicians check into that, please?

[*Translation*]

M. Luc Berthold: Why don't we allow our assistants to participate in the Zoom meeting with a closed camera? They could attend at the same time as us and hear the discussions as we go along so they can give us advice. Our assistants could be instructed to close their cameras. We would only see the people who are normally present at the meeting: the clerk, the analysts, and the MPs. That would be one way to deal with all the problems. We would also be able to see which assistants are present, in the same way that we can normally see who is attending our meetings when they are in person. If our employees attend the meeting by phone, we can't know that and we have no idea who is attending the meetings.

• (1120)

[*English*]

The Clerk: Madam Chair, would you like me to respond?

The Chair: Yes.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Unfortunately, I don't have an answer to that, but I'll check.

I know that when we first started using this new format for meetings, the sound quality was not good when there were a lot of participants. I think it's different now.

I don't have a precise answer yet, but I will check and then provide the information to the committee.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: I'd like to raise a second point, Madam Chair.

It works very well for my staff, in particular. However, people who work in a whip's or House leader's office participate in meetings by phone [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, you're not coming through very clearly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Fine.

Are things better now for the interpreters?

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Greg Fergus: I would like to raise the following point.

People who attend meetings from the office of a whip or House leader do not just follow one committee meeting at a time, but two or three, depending on the schedule of the day. You can only attend one meeting at a time when using the Zoom platform. However, when you participate in meetings by phone, you can follow several meetings at the same time.

It may be possible to make changes to our Zoom videoconferencing system so that we can follow more than one meeting at a time, but I don't think that's technically possible at this time.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Berthold.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Fergus, I wasn't talking about the employees in a whip's office, but about our own assistants, who are supposed to help us during the meetings. They have to be connected with us at the same time. Otherwise, they can't help us do our work as they would if the meetings were in person.

From what I understand, the clerk will check the system's ability to accommodate our assistants. Again, I suggest that our assistants be able to participate in the meeting with a closed camera. That way, we know they are present and that they are participating in the meeting. I'm in agreement to wait for the clerk's response on this.

[English]

The Chair: Before we go to our clerk, Mr. Longfield, you had raised your hand earlier. Do you have any comments to make?

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thanks, Madam Chair. I think it's a great suggestion that Mr. Berthold brings forward. If we were all on the same technology, that would take one of the variables out of it. If it's at all possible, it would be great to be able to accommodate that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Longfield.

Madam Clerk.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Chair, I also raised my hand.

[English]

The Clerk: Okay.

The Chair: My apologies, Mr. Blanchette.

My apologies, Madam Clerk.

Mr. Blanchette.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I just wanted to pass on to my colleagues some information that could be useful to them. Normal-

ly, the senior clerk should give us an answer next week about the attendance of our assistants at committee meetings held using Zoom. We are awaiting confirmation. The clerk could confirm that.

• (1125)

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

That's exactly what I want to know. I will confirm this with the committees directorate.

[English]

The Chair: Are we ready to adopt this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next motion reads as follows:

That one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee or by their staff.

The Chair: Are there any comments?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next reads:

That a 48 hours' notice, interpreted as two nights, shall be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, provided that (1) the notice be filed with the clerk of the committee no later than 4:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday; that (2) the motion be distributed to members in both official languages by the clerk on the same day the said notice was transmitted if it was received no later than the deadline hour; and that (3) notices received after the deadline hour or on non-business days be deemed to have been received during the next business day and that when the committee is travelling on official business, no substantive motions may be moved.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next reads:

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

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

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

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

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next reads:

That the committee Chair and staff be authorized to:

- review government responses to recommendations made by the committee during the 43rd Parliament;
- acknowledge by letter, on the committee's behalf, receipt of government responses where they respond clearly and completely to recommendations or request further information or clarification, as required;
- monitor the implementation of government commitments made in response to committee recommendations, and request further information as required; and,
- report to the committee on these activities in a timely fashion.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next reads as follows:

That all organizations that have been subject to a performance audit or a special examination by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada provide a detailed action plan to address the audit recommendations which have been agreed to—including specific actions, timelines for their completion and responsible individuals—to the committee and the Office of the Auditor General of Canada within six months of the audit being tabled in the House of Commons.

● (1130)

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next reads:

That organizations that are invited to appear before the committee to discuss the findings of an audit should provide an action plan to the committee no later than 48 hours prior to the hearing.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next reads:

That action plans and progress reports received by the committee be published on the committee's website.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: The next reads as follows:

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to purchase an appropriate gift to be presented to visiting delegations, and that the Chair report it to the committee.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I want to apologize. I received some very good instructions from our clerk on providing instructions for how we would function virtually, and I neglected to look at my email after I was elected chair, so I will make sure to do that at the beginning of the next meeting.

I want to move to other business. I see there are no other routine motions.

Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: My apologies, Madam Chair. It's not a routine motion, but I do have a motion that would have us reintroduce our invitations to past chairs of this committee to present to us, because that's where we left off prior to COVID, and we didn't meet during prorogation.

The Chair: Are you putting that motion on notice, or are you hoping this committee would—

Mr. Matthew Green: It's pertaining to the business. In my opinion, I would like the committee to revisit those past motions, and reinstate the past chairs as an orientation for new members to this committee on the processes and procedures of public accounts, because this particular committee functions in a highly specific way.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, do I need unanimous consent to proceed with a motion at this time?

The Clerk: No. Mr. Green has moved a motion, and the committee may consider it.

The Chair: Mr. Green, do you have any further comments?

Mr. Matthew Green: It's pretty self-evident. Most of the chairs from the various parties are coming. I know that my predecessor, Mr. David Christopherson, had decades of experience on this committee. We would all benefit hearing from the past wisdom of these committee chairs, because it is a unique committee that we're on, one that supersedes any kind of partisanship. We want to make sure that we have the best information during that transfer.

I was looking forward to it prior to COVID, quite frankly, but we didn't get to it. We have had so much time away, so I look forward to getting back to that business.

The Chair: Is there any other discussion?

Mr. Berthold, please go ahead.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have no problem with the motion. I think it would help us.

The Chair: Mr. Longfield, you are next.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: First of all, I'd like to comment on Dean Allison, who was also a really good chair in the short period I interacted with him. He does have a lot to bring back to us in terms of institutional knowledge.

I wonder whether part of this motion could also talk about orientation in general, that the orientation would include a previous chair coming forward to discuss the operation of the committee. We also had some very good orientation from the Clerk's office. We have a lot of new members on the committee, and I found the orientation to be excellent. If we were able to have another orientation session, showing us what the committee does when it's on a good day, what kinds of challenges we might have and how to handle those challenges going forward in a non-partisan way....

I would suggest that part of the motion state that we bring back the previous chairs, and that we have orientation by the department.

● (1135)

The Chair: Mr. Green, do you see that as a friendly amendment to your motion?

Mr. Matthew Green: I know that Mr. Allison was newly elected in the very short period of time that we met, but if my memory serves me correctly, it was actually Mr. Kevin Sorenson and Mr. Shawn Murphy, the past Liberal and Conservative chairs, who had a little bit more time in the chair. Mr. Allison was a very short-lived chair of this committee.

For the record, it's the Canadian Audit & Accountability Foundation that Mr. Longfield was referencing with regard to our initial orientation, which I also found to be an incredibly great start to this. I would welcome that as part of our overall resumption of this committee.

Mr. Christopherson, Mr. Sorenson and Mr. Murphy would be the people who would be in keeping with the motion.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Green.

I now have Mr. Sorbara.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you, Chair.

Chair, through you to MP Green, can you read the motion from the beginning, or the motion you wish to present, please?

Mr. Matthew Green: I move:

That the Committee re-invite past chairs of the committee, including Shawn Murphy, Kevin Sorenson, Dean Allison and David Christopherson, and invite the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation to provide an orientation briefing to members of the committee.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you.

Chair, through you to Mr. Green, I'm in full support of that motion, along with incorporating the comments that our vice-chair on our side made on the orientation session. I think that's a constructive motion to put forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now go to Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Chair, I was going to move a similar motion to Mr. Longfield's.

I appreciate Mr. Green's motion. To tell you the truth, I could use a second orientation from the Canadian association. I'm hoping it will stick a little more in my head, because it was a lot of information they provided to us. I say this for the new members: These orientation sessions were fabulous.

In the history of this committee, I don't know over how many Parliaments, it has presented unanimous reports. There have been no dissenting reports from this committee for a long time. I think that's because the committee has had the benefit of this kind of training. We take our fiduciary responsibilities as members of Parliament, not as political representatives but as members of Parliament, seriously to make sure that this committee continues to do great work.

I look forward to voting in favour of this motion and getting that training back.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have Mr. Berthold, then Mr. Longfield and Mr. Webber.

Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would invite Mr. Green to add Mr. Dean Allison to the list of former chairs. A former chair cannot be bypassed simply because

the House did not sit long in that session of Parliament. He is a former chair, so I would add him. He will decide for himself whether or not he thinks it is appropriate to come and share his experience. I think it would be disrespectful not to invite Mr. Allison, who has also been a chair of the committee.

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Berthold and I have worked together and often finish each other's sentences, which we should both be afraid of. I think that having Mr. Allison back would be very beneficial.

I would also like to suggest that we do this as a first order of business and that we move this even into the next meeting if possible. If we could put a timeline on the motion, then I would support the motion 100% with the addition of Mr. Allison and with this as the first order of business.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Webber.

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to make sure that you can all hear me. We had difficulty in pretesting my microphones. I assume you can hear me fine.

Great. I see that thumbs are up.

I absolutely support the motion with the additions of Mr. Allison and such. As a new member of this committee, I very much look forward to an orientation. I served close to eight long years on the public accounts committee in the province of Alberta, so I'm curious to know how the operations here work and whether there are any differences, which I'm sure there are.

I look forward to learning how you run the operation here.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Webber.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: I would like to make another proposal, Madam Chair. I hope this is still consistent with the idea of Mr. Green's motion and the proposed amendment. In addition to the foundation and all the past chairs of the committee, can we include the Comptroller General and the Auditor General among those to be invited? We did that at the orientation sessions we had a few months ago, and I think it would be a good idea to do it again.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: I think he's quite right. I'm unclear about the timing. I know the presentation was fairly fulsome. It may need to be broken up into two days, but that is right in keeping with the spirit of our past business, if I recall.

Thank you for the intervention, Mr. Fergus. It's Professor Fergus, and he is looking very professorial, for the record, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Berthold, you are muted.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Madam Chair. There are far too many buttons you have to press to speak in French and then listen in English afterwards.

I would just like to say that it has been a long time since we last met with the Auditor General and the Comptroller General of Canada. Immediately following my comment, I'm going to move a motion to invite the Auditor General to appear next week to report on the status of reports, deadlines and what has happened since her appointment in June. It is important that we receive her promptly so that we can plan for all of our future work.

I support Mr. Green's motion to have an orientation session where we would have past chairs of the committee and people from the foundation. However, we should not spend our next six meetings doing training; we need to limit ourselves. It is also our responsibility to seek training to serve on this committee.

So I would keep the first draft of Mr. Green's motion, which is to invite past chairs of the committee and the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation to provide training.

As for the Auditor General and the Comptroller General, we have a lot of questions for them. I would exclude them from the motion, if Mr. Green agrees, but then I would bring forward another motion to have the new Auditor General come here.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Berthold.

I believe that we can entertain that motion, or you can at least give us notice of that motion, to invite the Auditor General and the comptroller. That would be something that we deal with after this, after Mr. Green's motion.

I did see Mr. Lawrence's hand up.

Mr. Lawrence.

• (1145)

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Briefly, I support going forward with Deputy Green's motion, just as a singular. Then we can look at Mr. Berthold's motion with respect to the Auditor General.

The Chair: Is everybody clear on what we are voting on?

Mr. Greg Fergus: I would love to hear from Mr. Green.

Madam Chair, I think he had accepted two friendly amendments to his motion. I don't know whether it's one or two. Perhaps Mr. Green could clarify that.

Just as a point of information, perhaps the IT people can make the following clear.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, if you have the latest version of Zoom that the House has encouraged us to use, you don't need to signal when you want to speak in French. With this new version, you can use the floor channel and it will work. It wasn't possible with the version we were using in May, but it is possible with the new version. This remains to be confirmed with the information technology people.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Fergus, for that clarification.

Mr. Green, Mr. Fergus has asked for clarification, I believe, to the two friendly amendments that were made and we've now had one of our members suggest that we separate out the second friendly amendment into a separate motion that he'd be willing to make.

Mr. Matthew Green: If I recall—and notwithstanding that there's no such thing as friendly amendments, as I'm sure the clerk would remind us—the collaborative spirit of this conversation has landed us in a place where in my motion we are inviting back the past chairs, inclusive of Mr. Allison, Mr. Christopherson, Mr. Sorenson, and Mr. Murphy, and that we are also going to invite back the Canadian Audit & Accountability Foundation, as we had done in an orientation in the previous meetings. Full stop, and then I'll leave the rest to my good friend, Mr. Berthold.

The Chair: Are we ready for the question?

All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I sent the motion to the clerk earlier this morning. She will be able to forward a copy to you.

This is a fairly simple motion, which reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Public Accounts invite the Auditor General of Canada to testify at its meeting on Thursday, October 22, 2020, or on Thursday, October 29, 2020, to provide an update on the current audits and the expected deadlines for the publication of the next reports; that during this meeting, the first hour be in camera and that the second hour be public; and that the public portion be televised.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thanks. I had an email coming in, so I couldn't raise my hand on the right-hand part of my screen.

I think if we did the training first, then we would know how to deal with Auditor General questions. To get the process of how we function as a committee as a first order of business, I agree we need to get the Auditor General in, especially in her new role. I know the clock is ticking because in November we're going to have the public accounts coming at us. There is going to be a fairly heavy workload thrown at us in November, I'm guessing.

I would say, let's try to get our committee processes and procedures and reflections done first, and then get the Auditor General in once we've had our training on how to function as a committee.

The Chair: Is there any other discussion?

Mr. Fergus.

[Translation]

Mr. Greg Fergus: I would like to add something, and despite my friend Mr. Green's statement, I hope that it will be considered as a friendly amendment.

I don't want to change anything in Mr. Berthold's motion, since I agree with him that the Auditor General and the Comptroller General should appear before the committee as soon as possible. I would like to add, however, that we should first have some training from the other guests before inviting these witnesses to come and present the statement of accounts and audits at the next meeting.

Mr. Berthold, I don't remember if you were a member of the committee before the prorogation. We received very detailed training on how to read the statement of accounts, the right questions to ask and the questions to avoid. I found it very useful. The committee analyst is waving; he may have an update on this.

I support your motion, Mr. Berthold. My proposal does not constitute a dilatory motion. I simply want us to receive training first, so that we can then ask questions.

• (1150)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

I would turn it over to Mr. Theckedath.

Mr. Dillan Theckedath (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, everybody.

[Translation]

I'm Dillan Theckedath. Mr. Leonard and I are the two analysts assigned to the committee.

I'd like to say something about the steps to follow when it comes to inviting the Auditor General and the people who work in the public accounts area. When you're doing a study on public accounts, normally the...

[English]

The Chair: One moment.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I have a point of order.

The Chair: I think we're having troubles.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Yes.

The Chair: We have both the French and the English at the same time talking over one another.

Mr. Dillan Theckedath: I'll speak in English for technical reasons right now.

When we have a meeting of the public accounts committee, it has been the practice in recent years to have it divided into two one-hour sessions. During first hour, in addition to staff from the OAG who provide an audit opinion of the public accounts, we also include the people at the Office of the Comptroller General who help prepare them.

We have one in camera session, and then we have one public session in which we study the public accounts, ask questions, etc.

One way, perhaps, in which to accommodate the *volonté* of the committee would be to have a session with the past chairs, the Canadian Audit & Accountability Foundation and, if possible, the Auditor General of Canada, Ms. Hogan.

Then when we study the public accounts in the next meeting, it can be assured that both the OAG, as well as the staff, including the comptroller general, will be there for the first half of the in camera session.

I just wanted to help provide some background for the committee.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dillan.

I see Mr. Green.

Go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I know that in short order, as Mr. Longfield referenced, it's likely that we're going to get to a point where we'll be meeting twice a week, based on the workload.

As a thought for the committee, given that we haven't met for quite some time now, if it makes sense or if it is both considered urgent and important, perhaps in the week that we do our orientation we can book a second meeting to deal with the business at hand in the event that it might take us longer than we might have in one sitting to get it all done.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Green.

I am going to go to Madam Clerk because I know they're working with the schedule for committees and the House's ability or capacity to hold a certain number of minutes.

Madam Clerk, would you speak to Mr. Green?

The Clerk: I was informed this morning that the committees will be meeting once a week for the next two weeks, and that the public accounts committee is scheduled to meet on Thursday morning from 11 to 1 both next week and the following week. We would only have one meeting a week for those two weeks.

If you want to have an orientation session the first week and then a session with the Auditor General's office the second week, that's something the committee could do.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Clerk.

Mr. Berthold, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have no objection to an orientation session.

In my motion, instead of talking about Thursday, October 22, we could say October 22, which is next week, or October 29, which is the following week. That would give the clerk some latitude in organizing the meetings if, for example, some guests were not available on Thursday of next week. It would also give them some latitude.

If we can't hold the training session before the week of October 29, we could still have the Auditor General come in next week and ask her questions. However, I prefer that we have the orientation session next week.

If everyone agrees, I will amend my motion to say "at its meeting on Thursday, October 22, 2020, or Thursday, October 29, 2020". So the clerk will be able to schedule the orientation session at either of those two meetings, depending on people's availability.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Berthold.

Are there any other comments to be made? If not, I will assume that we are ready for the question.

All those in favour of Mr. Berthold's motion?

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is there any other future business that the committee wishes to discuss at this time? If not, I would need the consent of the committee to adjourn the meeting.

Do I have your consent to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: That was a great job, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I wish you all a great day and a wonderful weekend.

The meeting is adjourned.

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