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Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina



Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Tuesday, October 27, 2020

• (1135)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.)): As chair of the indigenous and northern affairs committee, I call the meeting to order. Welcome, everyone.

I would like to start by acknowledging that I am joining you today from the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinabe and Chonnonton nations.

The committee began meeting and continues to meet for the purpose of receiving evidence concerning matters related to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today's meeting is taking place by video conference, and the proceedings are being made available via the House of Commons website. During this meeting, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

In order to facilitate the work of our interpreters and ensure an orderly meeting, here are a few rules to follow.

Interpretation will work very much as it does in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of "Floor", "English" or "French". In order to resolve the sound issues raised in recent virtual committee meetings and ensure clear audio transmission, we ask those who wish to speak during the meeting to set their interpretation language as follows: If speaking in English, ensure you are on the English channel; when speaking in French, ensure you are on the French channel. As you are speaking, if you plan to alternate from one language to the other, you will need to switch the interpretation channel so that it aligns with the language you are speaking. You may want to allow for a short pause when switching languages.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name.

When you are ready to speak, you can either click on the microphone icon to activate it or you can hold down the space bar while you are speaking. When you release the bar, your microphone will mute, like a walkie-talkie.

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

Should members need to request the floor outside of their designated time for questions, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order. If members wish to intervene on a point of order that has been raised by another member, they should

use the "raise hand" function. This will signal to the chair your interest to speak.

In order to do so, you should click on "Participants" at the bottom of the screen, and when the list pops up, you will see that, next to your name, you can click on "raise hand". I'll try to make sure that it comes into my spectrum of vision.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. The use of headsets, of course, is strongly encouraged. If you're using earbuds, please hold the microphone near your mouth when you are speaking for our interpreters.

If there are any technical challenges arising in relation to interpretation or if you are accidentally disconnected, please advise the chair or the clerk immediately, and the technical team will work to resolve the issue. Please note that we may need to suspend during these times, as we need to ensure all members are able to participate fully.

Before we get started, I will ask everyone to please click on your screen in the top right-hand corner and ensure you are on gallery view. With this view, you should be able to see all of the participants in a grid view and see one another.

During this meeting, we will follow the same rules that usually apply to opening statements and the rounds for questioning of witnesses during our regular meetings. We have acknowledged up to 10 minutes for opening statements; however, that may change from time to time, and certainly we have some rules for our ministerial guests in our later meeting.

With that, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this meeting of the indigenous and northern affairs committee.

Actually, I mentioned 10 minutes, but we have agreed upon a six-minute witness time. That requirement will come into effect later on. Right now our job is to deal with the subcommittee report, which hopefully will enable us to get on with arranging witnesses for the study.

• (1140)

Are there any comments with regard to the subcommittee report?

Hearing none, do we all have the subcommittee report proposals for study before us? Is everyone good? I don't see anyone saying no.

Mr. Anandasangaree, go ahead, please.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I understand that we're to now discuss Mr. Melillo's motion.

The Chair: Yes, I'm sorry. I don't have my digital binder in front of me, for which I apologize. Cathy and I are in the same bind. I'm trying to find out, from the stacks of papers all around me, what is up for discussion.

The first one we have is the motion left over from the previous meeting. That's Mr. Melillo's motion.

Eric, would you like to read your motion once again?

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The motion is as follows:

That the committee recognizes the immediate need for investment in broadband in Northern Canada to ensure remote communities are not left behind during this pandemic, and this be reported to the House.

The Chair: Mr. Anandasangaree, you have the floor.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: We would be prepared to support that motion, Mr. Chair. If you want, we can have a discussion on it, but I think we'll be willing to support that motion. We thank Mr. Melillo for bringing it forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

By the way, Ms. Zann, I see that you're connected. Are you hearing the proceedings okay?

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Yes, I'm hearing everything. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, great.

With regard to the motion, does someone wish to speak to it or add any further discussion to it?

Seeing no further discussion, Mr. Clerk, can we ask for unanimous consent on the motion? We can. That's the way we'll approach it, then. Thank you very much.

Is there anyone opposed to unanimous consent on the motion put forward by Mr. Melillo?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Melillo, your motion is accepted unanimously by the committee. Thank you very much for that. Thanks for bringing it forward.

Thanks, everyone. There was much discussion over the past couple of weeks about how we should proceed. I will say once again, as the chair, that it was somewhat different in terms of what I had experienced in chairing and in other committee duties. I was hoping that it would be in order. It is, and it is duly passed unanimously by the committee. Thank you very much.

The next order of business is the work we're going to do as a subcommittee. Mr. Clerk, can you outline what is before us now?

• (1145)

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Naaman Sugrue): Pursuant to the subcommittee report that was adopted, we have the meeting later today on the new COVID study. We will also be inviting the ministers for the supplementary estimates (B) whenever they're

available. It's my understanding, based on what Mr. Anandasangaree said, that they will be available soon.

We have also initiated a study on food security. We've ensured that we have added the previous session's evidence to that study.

We're awaiting a list of witnesses for the COVID support study. The list is due by Friday, October 30. It will then be up to the committee or subcommittee to decide in what order meetings happen for these various studies.

Based on my understanding of things, as I last heard, the COVID support study would take priority. We can move to the supplementary estimates (B) whenever witnesses are available, and to the food security study when and if there is time following the COVID support study.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion among the parties with regard to how we're moving forward?

Go ahead, Cathy.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): The only outstanding issue, which we will be getting advice about, is the way in which we need to adopt the main estimates in this new session of Parliament, but certainly I understand that we can wait until advised by the clerk as to proper process, given its approval in the past Parliament.

The Chair: Right.

Is there any further discussion? Madam Bérubé, Mr. Anandasangaree and Ms. Blaney, are we good?

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): We are good.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Members of the committee, I need to apologize once again. The technical issues leading into this meeting were onerous. I spent the first 45 minutes not in preparing for the meeting today but in actually trying to get the technical issues sorted out. I think we're in a good place now.

We have approval of Mr. Melillo's motion. We know of the work that we're prepared to do in the short term for the subcommittee. The adoption of the mains is a work in progress, but we have a comfort level that they will be done in a timely manner before we run out of time in November.

Mr. Anandasangaree, is there anything further that you wish to add?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: The only issue, I think, is that the deadline for witnesses for this study is this Friday. Our next scheduled meeting after tonight's is next Tuesday. In order to not completely waste the Tuesday meeting, I'm wondering if the committee would be willing to invite the NIOs. We could spend half an hour to build the work plan and then have three half-hour slots or a combined meeting for the NIOs on Tuesday. Otherwise, I think we risk not maximizing that day by not having witnesses available.

We're open to suggestions on how we handle that.

• (1150)

The Chair: Is there any further response? Are we good with that?

Mr. Clerk, you wish to comment about the mains. What can you offer?

The Clerk: That's right. Although INAN did pass the main estimates in committee back on March 12 of this year, they were not tabled in the House before prorogation. We would need to either resurrect that report and edit it or create a new report by voting on them. If we do not study them, then they'll automatically be reported back on the deadline.

The Chair: Does anyone see any need to dig back into it, or are we satisfied with what was concluded but not tabled? Are we good with that?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: If I may just clarify, Mr. Clerk, do we need to bring a new motion, or do we just need to go through the specific votes that we did back in June? Can you clarify? If so, do you have the language available so that we can dispose of it today?

The Clerk: I can prepare something so that we can dispose of it today. I'll need a few minutes to do so, but yes, nothing prevents the committee from doing that.

The Chair: Okay.

Also, Mr. Clerk, is there anything further on Mr. Melillo's motion that the committee needs to do?

The Clerk: That motion instructs that the committee's views be reported to the House. The analysts will draft a very short report expressing that, and then the committee can adopt it and it can be presented to the House by you.

The Chair: Are we going to do that today or in a subsequent meeting?

The Clerk: It's also up to the committee. If, between the committee and the analysts, you want to wordsmith a report right now, and then instruct that the report, once it's drafted, be presented to the House by the chair, then that's totally within the committee's power.

The Chair: I'm in the hands of the committee.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I'm not sure a report needs to be prepared. My understanding is that the motion will stand as being reported to the House, and we did pass that motion.

The Clerk: Yes, that motion can be directly reported word for word.

The Chair: That sounds good to me. Cathy, thanks for that.

Is there anything further, Gary?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: It's just the main estimates. Maybe, Mr. Clerk, we can dispose of that item if you're able to give us the language.

The Chair: Do we require a five-minute suspension to allow for that?

The Clerk: Yes, please. I would appreciate that.

The Chair: Okay. We'll suspend for just a few minutes.

Everybody please stay on the screen. When you see me jumping around, you'll know that it's time to dispose of that item of business, so don't go away.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1150)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: I call this meeting to order once again, as we continue with our work as the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) and the order made on Monday, April 20, 2020, each committee may consider and report, or shall be deemed to have reported, the votes on the main estimates back to the House not later than Friday, November 27, 2020.

The votes referred back to our committee are on the Canadian High Arctic Research Station, the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, and the Department of Indigenous Services.

Before I call the vote, are the members of the committee satisfied with the procedure at this point?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Chair, I just want to note for the record that because the ministers did appear in the previous Parliament and the vote happened but was not reported to the House, I think it's absolutely critical that we do due diligence in terms of this process for the estimates. I never like to see them deemed reported—I think it is one of our fundamental jobs—but, as indicated, the ministers did appear in the previous session of Parliament and due diligence was done, so I think we will certainly be happy to move forward with less process than we would normally want.

For the supplementary estimates coming up, obviously we're grateful to hear that the ministers will be in attendance, and we will have an opportunity to discuss those estimates at that time.

Thank you.

• (1210)

The Chair: Is there further comment?

Go ahead, Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: No, Mr. Chair, I think we're quite satisfied, and I thank all the members for their co-operation.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, how shall we proceed with the vote now?

The Clerk: You can call vote 1 and there can be debate, unless that was all the debate to take place, in which case we can move on with the individual votes.

The Chair: Just to be certain, we have vote 1, followed by votes 5, 10 and 15 under Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs; and then votes 1, 5 and 10. I just want to be sure that we're proceeding carefully and correctly.

The Clerk: That's right.

Vote 1 is just a trigger to initiate debate. If there is no more debate, then we go back to vote 1 for the Canadian High Arctic and vote on that, and so on and so forth.

The Chair: Can we do the vote, Mr. Clerk, under unanimous consent or do we do it on division?

The Clerk: We can do one of those two, or we can have a recorded vote. Those would be the three options.

The Chair: Committee, I am going to ask for unanimous consent, which requires someone to tell me that they do not wish to proceed under unanimous consent, which would then lead to our going to a recorded vote.

Is there anyone opposed to unanimous consent?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Chair, we will be voting on division for the vast majority of these votes.

Thank you.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I concur. We'll be voting on division.

The Chair: Okay.

On division, I believe I'm going to be required, Mr. Clerk, to go through each one of the votes as they are listed. Is that correct? I want to be sure now that we don't just do all of them at once.

The Clerk: Yes, it will be for each grouping of votes, so there will be three separate divisions that will go through, and then the final question of whether or not it will be reported to the House.

The Chair: Okay.

Can we begin, then, on division with regard to the main estimates?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

CANADIAN HIGH ARCTIC RESEARCH STATION
Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$29,453,623

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF CROWN-INDIGENOUS RELATIONS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS
Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,528,290,836
Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$268,287
Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$3,309,017,994
Vote L15—Loans to Indigenous claimants.....\$25,903,000

(Votes 1, 5, 10 and L15 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF INDIGENOUS SERVICES
Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,949,217,820
Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$6,832,498
Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$10,741,544,381

(Votes 1, 5 and 10 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Okay. We've carried that on division, and I now need your advice. Do you allow me as the chair to report this to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I believe we have unanimity, Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: That is noted.

That concludes the main estimates.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thanks very much, everybody.

I'm sorry about the delay, Mr. Viersen. You have your hand up. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to take the opportunity here to pass the motion I put on notice in the last meeting when we were all together, which is:

That the committee extend condolences to the family of Joyce Echaquan and express great concern over her treatment and this be reported to the House.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Is there any comment on the motion?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair, I note that the House has already expressed this through a moment of silence. We are willing to certainly support this motion, but I think procedurally we did have a conversation that if this is going to be ongoing in terms of other motions from the floor, then I think we do need to have a mechanism whereby we can channel that. Certainly, in this case, we are willing to support it and have it reported.

The Chair: Are there any further comments? Is there anyone opposed to unanimous consent? Hearing none, I declare the motion passed with unanimous consent.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: With that, I believe what's left for me to do as the chair is advise everyone that we have another meeting today, which is at 6:30 this evening.

Beyond that, Mr. Clerk, is there anything we have overlooked?

The Clerk: There is nothing on my agenda currently.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

Once again, it has been a bit of a tumultuous morning for me and for a few others in trying to connect. I think it will be a lot smoother tonight, although much longer, I'll predict, with our minister. Bearing in mind that we will gather once again at 6:30 p.m. with the indigenous and northern affairs committee, I declare this meeting adjourned.

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