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Chair

Ms. Ruby Sahota

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.)): This meeting is now in session.

Good morning, everyone.

Right off the bat, I have a couple of questions before we get into committee business. One of them relates to the motion on meals that we passed during routine motions. I believe the clerk is going to provide for a good rotation of hot meals, but I just want to find out if there are any dietary restrictions. I have heard from colleagues in the past that sometimes those things are not taken into account very well, and we wouldn't want anyone stuck here without adequate meals.

Are there any dietary restrictions or allergies or even preferences?

Yes.

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Yes, to gluten and dairy, but please don't change anything for me.

The Chair: No?

If there is something you'd like to mention to the clerk and you don't want to bring it up here today, that's fine. You can speak to the clerk about that, and he will take it into consideration when ordering the meals.

I just wanted to let you know that you can raise your voice and let us know, and we'll try to accommodate you.

The next thing is something that I think might be beneficial for new and old members if you have questions. I had the benefit of sitting down with the clerk and the analysts team yesterday to sort out some questions I had on my mind, and I thought why just me? Why not include all the members of the committee who might have procedural questions or other questions about topics and things that come up here in this committee?

You're free to contact the clerk and the team. They have been gracious enough to say they would be willing to accommodate us and take a meeting. Whether you want to do it party by party or as individuals, they will make time to make sure they can guide you if you have any questions. Please feel free to contact any of us about that.

Now we will start with committee business.

We have Ms. Blaney's motion on the floor, so I think it is only appropriate to go back to that at this point to see if there is any discussion on it, or whether we're in a position to vote on her motion.

We have a list of about four names from the last time. Would we like to go back to that speaking order?

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): I'm on it first.

The Chair: You are, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I do have more to say, for sure. I won't be as long as I was at the last meeting. I promise that. You never know, I suppose, but I don't plan to be. I do have a few more things I'd like to say at this point.

I know some of my colleagues had a few things they'd like to say.

I may want to look at maybe moving an amendment at some point as well, but I'll let some of my colleagues have a chance to have a say first, so maybe you could just add me back on the list and if I choose to do that amendment, I can do it at that point.

I obviously outlined some of my concerns last time around, primarily with the Standing Orders changes. Last time I did lay out some of the background of the changes that were attempted in the last Parliament and why it was so important that in order to make those kinds of changes there be agreement among all parties on the principle that all members are affected by those changes as well as how critical that is.

In the last Parliament when the government tried to move forward with changes that weren't supported by opposition parties, it was something that both we, the Conservatives, and the NDP at that time were strongly opposed to. We were concerned about that sort of plan to move forward without having worked with the opposition parties and without having arrived at a consensus with everybody. We remain concerned about that.

There were indications given that some conversations had occurred prior to this being brought forward. I certainly was not aware of those, and when I talked to my other colleagues on the committee, they didn't seem to be aware of them either.

It was something that came before us as a bit of a surprise, and I do remain concerned about the idea that we would make these kinds of changes without everyone agreeing. As a point, at the last meeting I said I was concerned about the changes because I am a fiscal conservative, and we would be looking at adding an extra salary for, I think.... How many committees are there?

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): There are 24.

Mr. Blake Richards: My colleague tells me there are 24 committees. So we'd be looking an additional 24 salaries of, I believe, \$6,200 each is the pay increase, so we'd be talking about more than \$150,000. That's money that comes out of Canadians' pockets and there are a lot of Canadians for whom \$150,000 could make a pretty big difference.

I'll get into that in a second, but the bottom line here is that we're talking about additional pay essentially for the entire caucus of the smallest official party in Parliament. In fact it would almost certainly amount to, for some of those members of that caucus, two additional salaries. Given the number of members they have in the caucus and the number of committee there are, it's pretty clear that would have to be the case.

I've sat on a lot of committees. I've chaired a lot of committees. I've been the vice-chair of committees. There are times when a vice-chair does have to fill the chair's role, and that's the recognition of what's being done there, but I think it's pretty hard to imagine a scenario coming up very often, if ever, in which it gets to the point where we have to have a third vice-chair take the chair. So the idea of additional pay for that is something that I think would offend some Canadians, frankly, the idea that someone who probably will never have to actually exercise those duties would receive that. That's a concern that needs to be brought forward here as well.

I know some of my colleagues were a little upset with me last time that I didn't give them an opportunity to speak. I was trying to make sure that I earned my pay and I want to let them to have a chance to earn theirs. Maybe what I'll do, then, is to yield the floor. I think I have my name back on the list and maybe I can have an opportunity to move an amendment, if needed, at that time.

• (1110)

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, I'm going to defer to Mr. Tochor, if that's okay. I will put my name back on the list. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Thanks, John, and thank you to the committee for giving me this opportunity to speak about what's in front of us.

How we left it last week and what I did for the weekend is what I'm going to talk about today: how the people I represent in Saskatoon—University feel about the work that's getting done in Ottawa or the lack of work.

Most Saturdays, I like to go around to different establishments in Saskatoon. I was at Robin's Donuts on Central Avenue in Sutherland talking to average people about what they're facing in their lives. Without a doubt, if you go out there and talk to seniors, students or people with young families, they're struggling. They're looking to me as their member of Parliament. Especially for the seniors on fixed incomes, it's a tough conversation. They're getting squeezed in every direction. Probably the number one comment they have for me is, "You need to increase my pension. I can't survive on this."

I don't know what you guys tell people in that situation. We have limited control, obviously, in opposition and out here to affect people's lives, but what I'm hearing is that they're getting squeezed.

There's also another twinge to this. Maybe the guys who aren't from western Canada don't feel this, but every time I talk to someone there's this enraged feeling of neglect and alienation that the rest of Canada doesn't understand us. When I started talking about my work here, I shared with some of the people I represent the work of this committee and what we were discussing last week.

There was outrage that we were considering giving ourselves raises to the tune of thousands of dollars. We're looking at roughly \$500 or \$600 more a month. You look at these seniors and tell them, yes, this is what we were discussing at committee. It's disgusting. They go back to saying, "What about me? Why can't my pension go up?" I don't have a good answer for them. I don't know if you've had those conversations with the people you represent, but it is disgusting when they understand that we're here debating giving ourselves raises.... That's what ultimately this is. It's about money—or I feel it is.

Six thousand dollars a year for any member who is honoured to become this second vice-chair, it is... I don't know if it's going to make any difference in their lives, but for the people I represent it would be massive. If they could get a \$6,000 bump in their pensions, it would be the difference between affording medication and paying rent for that month. For us, \$6,000 is a substantial amount of money, but for the average Canadian to receive a bump in pay like that? They would be ecstatic. Also, if they had the power to give themselves that raise...that's where the conversation is a bit of a disconnect with average people. When you start talking about it, they say, okay, so you're on this committee that sets up the rules that govern yourselves in Ottawa, and you have a portion of that committee wanting to spend upwards of \$150,000 now? For what?

It's the value for money that average Canadians just couldn't understand, I don't think: that we could potentially give ourselves raises. That goes against, I believe, the convention in this place that members don't do that. It's set to different factors in the economy for our salary and our compensation, and to change that goes against some pretty long-held traditions that we don't do that in this country.

Another thing we don't do, especially since we're a Westminster democracy, is that we don't change the rules unless all parties agree. That's another part of the conversation I had with people back in Saskatoon this weekend. They can't get their heads wrapped around it.

• (1115)

It's like you're playing Monopoly. You have four players. One player has properties here and there, through chance and maybe through good decisions, and they've put themselves in a pretty good position. An analogy is that the other three players want to change the rules. There's no sport, no game, no fair competition that would allow a change of the rules midstream. Ideally, it's before. You set the ground rules of what governs whatever competition, and with consensus.

That's where I have concerns about the direction we're going in at this committee. If we start changing the rules without consensus, then it is a slippery slope. It will be difficult to try to explain this to the people we represent. If this motion passes, ultimately we will end up spending a substantial amount of money on ourselves. I can't, in good faith, go back to the people who elected me and say that this is the good work that we did on this committee.

On the financial side, \$6,000 a year to a member of Parliament is a nice bonus. If there's actual work getting done by that individual, I do understand. I support the notion that additional responsibilities warrant additional pay in some circumstances. But this is not normal. Giving ourselves or giving members a raise without consensus is changing the rules without all the players agreeing. I have real concerns about what that leads to in our democracy.

As for the dollars, if you go back this weekend, talk to a senior, to someone who's struggling, about what \$6,000, or roughly \$500 a month, would do for them. It will be hard to justify why these members are receiving these additional dollars if you look into the eyes of the senior who can't afford his medication and rent and who has to make that tough decision. I can't. I can't support this motion and still go back to that coffee table and explain the work we're doing out here. It's a substantial amount of money.

There's another element to this. Where does this money come from? The money comes from taxpayers. Taxes are important. They pay for important services in our country. But a dollar of overtaxation is theft.

I'll go back to maybe a small business owner in my community who's struggling. They're struggling because of the policies of this government, the policies of this country that aren't working for them. There are people who are going bankrupt right now and laying off people. I'm going to go to that person and say, "Yes, we are also spending an additional \$150,000." It could be that last dollar that put them over the edge and put them in bankruptcy now so that we can afford to give members additional dollars.

I can't square that circle. I don't know how you square that circle if you're talking to a taxpayer, to a senior, to someone struggling, about our reaching into their pockets and taking more taxes that we give to members who sit on a committee. I can't justify that to the people I represent. I don't know how you guys would as well.

Madam Chair, that's the end of my remarks. I'll pass it on to my colleague Eric.

• (1120)

The Chair: Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you very much.

Good morning, everybody.

This being my first chance to speak, I want to congratulate you on being elected as chair. Most days it would be congratulations. Some days it might be condolences. It depends on the circumstance.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Eric Duncan: The vice-chair did offer apologies that some of us were not able to speak the other day. I should say that I was very interested in the binders my colleague Mr. Genuis had here. We never did get to hear from them, but I think a lot of points were covered.

Mr. Blake Richards: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Eric Duncan: I was just going to say you're welcome, maybe, in return on that. I was riveted to see what he had in those binders, but maybe that's for another day or another topic.

As did the member for Kingston and the Islands, I served in municipal politics for 12 years. I served as a councillor. I got broken in gently at the age of 18, and was mayor for eight years and a regional chair. I'm actually much more comfortable sitting around a committee table like this than I am in the chamber though I am getting more used to that other side. I will say that I do appreciate the chance to speak on this today and to take the time to share some of the concerns and, I think, frustrations we have with the proposal that's before us.

One of my experiences from municipal life is to not be a fan of things just being put on the table and being voted on, and going with those. Having the chance to deliberate, to go back, not only amongst ourselves as committee members but, as Mr. Tochor mentioned as well, into our constituencies and to get feedback from constituents is important. Give us a chance to do that.

I won't repeat what Mr. Tochor said, but, frankly, when I was in my riding in the City of Cornwall, and I mentioned it to a few different constituents of mine in different settings, there was certainly frustration or shock with the proposal on the table and the way we're handling it and doing it.

I'll spend my time speaking on a few technical ends to the proposal and the motion before us. There have been a few comments about precedents being set, and about how there's this special committee right now on Canada-China relations, which has three vice-chairs.

As I am new to the place, you'll have to forgive me. There will be a few times, I'm sure, when I may need to be corrected, but I don't think right now is one of them. When we have special committees, that's exactly what they are. They're special. They're unique, for a variety of different reasons. Particularly given its file, the Canada-China committee, with its timelines and how they're being established, and the attention, frankly, not only within the parliamentary precinct but across the country and the micro-attention it's receiving, is important. The composition of that committee, where it's meeting, how it's meeting, the experts it brings in and how timely it is, I think, present, for a special committee, exactly what that is. It's a special circumstance. In that case, it can go there.

We can go back and look at standing committees in the past in other Parliaments. I think maintaining the two vice-chairs is something that is realistic and fair. That's what standing committees have had, it is my understanding, in majority and minority Parliaments over the years. I think it's something fair to do.

In the current situation, I do take to heart what the NDP says about realizing the situation we're in. No party has a majority. We need to work together on these things. The government needs to have support from at least one other party as we go forward with these things.

To the comments about being inclusive and having a co-operative tone, I took the perspective of the original proposal to include the NDP on the subcommittee of agenda and procedure, for example, as a good and fair way of making sure we're getting that co-operation. My understanding is that we deal with witnesses as we deal with the procedures of this committee. On each and every committee, there is that opportunity for the NDP to contribute to that end. When we look at this proposition, the proposal, the motion, that's on the table right now, frankly, the only difference I see here is the extra 6,000 and some dollars, \$6,200 or whatever it is, for extra members.

I'm not opposed, obviously, to having that bipartisan co-operation and having that co-operation, whether it be for this committee or in the precedent we set for other committees. I think when we're getting into having a third vice-chair and having dollars attached to that for, frankly, I don't believe much extra work if any, I think the optics of it are not the most positive. It doesn't look right, I think I could say, to my constituents and the people I've spoken to, but also to Canadians in general.

I hope, over the course of the next several months, for however many years this Parliament lasts and this term lasts, that we can work together on a lot of different topics in a consensus way, going by having all-party support and those types of things. But I think that what we have here now with this proposal does not exclude the NDP, the fourth party, from participating in the direction of the committees and the work that it does.

• (1125)

I just think the optics and the realities of this are not very good for Canadians, and I think are not very good for parliamentarians, frankly, on this end.

There are a few amendments, I believe, that we have put forward to deal with the situation and to maybe give a bit more clarity and decision on this, but I do look forward to getting past this, working on issues and showing Canadians that we are not about dollars, but about them and the workings of Parliament and the many things we have to handle over the next little while.

I'll leave my comments at that. I look forward to working with everybody.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I'm not going to make a lot of extra remarks at this point, but I do have an amendment that I'll move. The amendment is centred around trying to help us with a path forward here.

When we're looking at anything as this committee, I see that one of our key roles here is making sure that for Parliament and the way this Parliament is chosen—mainly with elections law—we're doing it in a way that is looking at it from a perspective of what is fair and what is helpful. I think anything we're doing should be done that

way. That's one of the reasons why we have the principle that we do these changes by consensus. Trying to have something with which all parties feel comfortable is very important. It's very important to operate in that way.

The idea that we want to make sure that.... Yes, in the last election, Canadians decided to reduce the number of seats that the NDP held and the number of seats that the government held, and to increase somewhat the seats that our party and the Bloc Québécois hold. That makes a change in terms of how representation works in Parliament, of course, and it also makes a change in how things work in committees.

I think there was a lot of effort to try to make sure the decision of Canadians was recognized in the way the committees were made up and in the way things were done. Respecting the ability of all parties to have a role in a minority Parliament like this one was critical. I think that was recognized and was done, as my colleague just pointed out, in the way that committees and the steering committees for each of the committees were made up.

When we look at this further change that's being requested here, as one of my colleagues pointed out, many Canadians would look at it simply as a way to get a pay increase for one of the caucuses. Essentially, what that boils down to is that it's being suggested for I think a couple of reasons. It's a thought that people have for a couple of reasons. One, obviously, is that it would lead to that entire caucus receiving extra salary and, in some cases, for some of those members of Parliament, receiving more than one additional salary.

Keeping in mind that there are many members, particularly those of the Liberal caucus and the Conservative caucus, who receive no extra salary, I appreciate there might be some indications that as a critic for a party maybe there is some extra responsibility, and there certainly is, but there also is for people who are deputy critics for a party or people in the government caucus. I don't know for certain the situation, but I recall that when I was first here in a minority Parliament as part of a government caucus, I sat on two different committees. There is a fair bit of extra work involved in being on two committees as well, and those things aren't recognized with additional salaries.

Maybe that's a conversation that at some point happens, but I don't think it should be done in the context of what we're talking about here. Also, as one of my colleagues pointed out, the idea that we would have members of committees voting to increase their own salaries, essentially, is something that probably offends Canadians. I don't really believe.... I certainly hope that wouldn't be what this is about.

The other thing that I think some Canadians might look at and call into question is that given that situation you're talking about, with an entire caucus having their salaries increased, in supporting that principle, is that an attempt by the government to buy favour from one particular caucus in order to keep the votes they need to pass legislation and keep themselves in power?

• (1130)

I'm not suggesting that's the case, but I can certainly see how it might appear to some people to be the case. We certainly always want to try to avoid those kinds of appearances.

I recognize that no one would want it to appear that way. No one in the NDP caucus would want it to appear as though they're taking that kind of payment, I guess. Nobody in the Liberal caucus would want to make it appear as though that would be the case.

I think there is a way we could move forward with this, to do what I believe is the intention here, without creating that kind of impression. I think the intention here—I certainly hope this is the case—is simply to recognize with a title the role that an NDP member would be playing on a steering committee, etc. The way we could do that would be by making the following amendment.

The motion, as it's been put forward, currently reads:

That for the remainder of the 43rd parliament, notwithstanding Standing Order 106(2), in addition to the Chair and first vice-chair, there be one vice-chair from the Bloc Québécois and one vice-chair from the New Democratic Party for all committees listed under Standing Order 104.

That's the motion as it stands now. What I would suggest we do would be to make the following amendments. We would replace everything after the words "Standing Order 106(2)" with the following:

for all committees listed under Standing Order 104, the first vice-chair shall be a member of the official opposition, the second vice-chair shall be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition party, and that the eligible member not selected for the position of second vice-chair be given the title of third vice-chair provided that they do not receive an additional salary under paragraph 62.1(1)(h) of the Parliament of Canada Act.

That would remove any of those impressions that people might have about payments and things like that. What it would do is, of course, provide for that title for the member of the other opposition party who wasn't chosen to be second vice-chair, and, I guess, provide some comfort that the recognition of their role on a steering committee is there. That's what I would move as an amendment at this time.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Richards.

We've been having some discussions about this. We're going to look into it a little bit further as to, administratively, what effect this would have. Procedurally, right now it is okay to move forward with this amendment at this committee.

We have started a new list on the amendment. Mr. Gerretsen is first on that list.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thanks for the comments that have been made today.

Mr. Duncan, we would not know, by your maiden speech, that you were uncomfortable speaking in the House.

• (1135)

Mr. Eric Duncan: Thank you.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I just want to start by saying that we brought forward a similar motion at the beginning, which I tried to present by consent. I do believe, when it comes down to it, that if we're going to be changing the rules, that should be done by consent. That being said, if there's a motion on the floor, I'm most definitely willing to entertain it and listen to it. Ultimately we have the responsibility to vote on that. That's how we've come to where we are today. I won't get into all of the discussion I've heard so far, al-

though I would question some of the comments that have been made.

My question, Madam Chair, for the mover of the motion is, just out of curiosity, especially given the comments that have been made by Conservatives today with respect to the need for the fiscal responsibility—and I share their concern, Madam Chair, about that need for fiscal responsibility—why he didn't move the motion in such a way that rather than eliminating the pay for one vice-chair, we take the pay from all the vice-chairs and divide it by three, or remove the pay from all vice-chairs completely. I'm just curious as to why he didn't choose to present his motion in that manner.

I know that he's a vice-chair, so maybe there's a bit of a conflict of interest there, but I'm just wondering why he chose to present the motion in the way he did as opposed to just taking the entire vice-chairs' salaries and dividing those by three. I don't know if he can answer that or if you would even entertain that, but that's just what I'm left wondering at this point.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm willing to respond, Madam Chair, if you'd like to indulge me.

The Chair: You can have the floor, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I think the bottom line here, as I indicated during my comments, is that if we are to decide as a committee or as Parliament to look at the ways in which we recognize the different roles and responsibilities with additional salaries more broadly, then that's a conversation, if people feel it's worth having, that we would have and we would make a decision on. I'm firmly of the belief that we should not make decisions about our own salaries, and that's what we're proposing to do with this motion. It's to make a decision about someone's own salary. But if we were to talk about that in terms of what would happen in future Parliaments, then as MPs we could all have that conversation, if all parties feel it's worth having, in terms of how salaries or additional salaries were to function.

It's one reason that, even for the base salaries of MPs, the decision was made a number of years ago to not put MPs in the position to make those kinds of decisions about their own salaries. We shouldn't be making those decisions for our own salaries. If we choose to change the way that's done for future Parliaments, that might be a different conversation. The problem here is that we're talking about making a change that individual MPs would be voting on that would affect their own salaries. I don't believe we should be putting anyone in that kind of position.

The idea here is to simply allow for the recognition that needs to be there, in some people's minds, of the fact that someone is sitting on a steering committee, but not put anyone in a position to vote for salary increases, especially in a minority Parliament like this one, where questions like those I raised earlier could come from Canadians.

That's the reason I've chosen to do this.

The Chair: At this point I'll take a bit of leeway, if you will indulge me, to talk about the procedural aspects of the amendment that's before us so that we fully understand before we continue debate on the amendment.

Looking at the Parliament of Canada Act, which we've been discussing, it seems that this amendment is procedurally okay at this committee, because it's within the scope of what we are talking about. But if this committee were to pass this amendment and it ended up on the floor of the House, it would essentially have no effect, because the Parliament of Canada Act makes it mandatory. It says that all vice-chairs "shall" be paid. We would not essentially be able to change that through a motion of this committee without an amendment to the actual act. It would essentially have no impact.

I just wanted to let the mover know that. We can proceed here at this committee. We can vote it down or we can pass it, but essentially it won't have the impact you're looking for.

• (1140)

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. I would be willing to entertain a suggestion from our clerk as to how we might better craft that so that it has the desired impact.

Madam Chair, while that discussion is happening, perhaps I can also get some clarification. What's provided for now is that there is a vice-chair and a second vice-chair. We'd be adding a third vice-chair. Is what you're telling me that the Parliament of Canada Act, if we decided to have a fourth, a fifth, a sixth and a seventh vice-chair, would allow for that as well? I'm not suggesting that we do this by any means, but if the committee decided that every member of the committee was to be a vice-chair, then would every member of the committee be paid an additional salary? Is that essentially it?

To me, I would think the Parliament of Canada Act would be specific. There are positions set for first and second vice-chairs.

The Chair: I can answer your question.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm just trying to get some clarification on that. Secondly, how could we then craft this so that it has the desired effect?

The Chair: Currently under the act, it does not distinguish between first vice-chair and second vice-chair. It just lists vice-chair. As you said, there are other positions listed, including assistant deputy chair and Speaker of the House of Commons. However, when it comes to the vice-chair position, first and second are not distinguished. It just says "Vice-Chair".

So you're correct that if everybody was a vice-chair, everybody would be paid.

Mr. Blake Richards: Do we have advice on how we might craft this in such a way that it would have the desired effect? Or would this be something we could recommend to the House? Then, if the House were to vote to accept this change, that would make the... I'm trying to understand.

The Chair: You'd have to have a piece of legislation.

Mr. Blake Richards: There's a bit of gap here. It's something that I guess no one ever foresaw in the legislation. It's the idea that someone could spew, why don't we make a third or a fifth or an eighth vice-chair? Nobody ever foresaw that happening, I guess, right? How do we reconcile that?

The Chair: Yes, I was thinking that as well. As for being able to change the act, you would have to have legislation, so we—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: A private member's bill.

The Chair: Yes, a private member's bill, or you could convince the government. You'd have to have a piece of legislation.

If you would like to suspend for 15 minutes or 10 minutes, Mr. Richards, I would be willing to indulge you so you can have a conversation.

Mr. Blake Richards: That would be helpful. I'd appreciate that. Thanks.

The Chair: Okay. We will suspend. Would 10 minutes be good?

Mr. Blake Richards: Sure. I think that should do it.

The Chair: Okay.

• (1140)

(Pause)

• (1150)

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Richards, I believe you wanted clarification. You have clarification and now you're looking at amending your amendment.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, I think maybe rather than making it an official amendment—because I don't know that I'm able to amend my own amendment—if the committee would agree just to make a small wording change that would then make it work as it was intended, if that would be okay, and make that the amendment rather than an amendment to the amendment....

Before I do that, could I just ask my NDP colleague, given the explanation I provided, which is that by doing this we're trying to find a way here to recognize their role on the committee—I'm assuming this is not about the money for them—if she would give me some indication as to whether this would be something that would be seen as a way of recognizing the role they play? Could I just get her thoughts on it quickly before I make the change here?

The Chair: Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the thoughtfulness of this important conversation.

I want to recognize first of all that the Conservative members at the last meeting of PROC talked extensively about the reality that for the second vice-chair of course it would happen differently in every committee, and that sometimes it would be the NDP and sometimes it would be the Bloc. I think it's really important that we remember here that this is not about one party. This is about looking at the reality of how this place is built and looking at the reality of the Canada-China committee, where there's now a difference between how some committees will be treated compared to others.

At the end of the day, this is about creating respectful relationships in this place. I'm certainly interested in having discussions about compensation for all roles. I think that's always an interesting conversation to have. I think we're very clear here, by what the chair has indicated from her discussion with the analyst and the clerk, that this isn't the right process to move forward. I'm interested to see what we can do in the future around this issue; obviously it doesn't sound like this committee is the right place.

I really want to also encourage my Conservative friends here. There are some really important conversations about challenges that many of our constituents are experiencing. I hope to see them working with us of course in our call to the Liberals around the increase in the OAS. Right now, the age for that is 75, and of course, as you've heard from our members, we want to see that lowered to the age of 65. If seniors are struggling, we absolutely want to help them as soon as we possibly can.

Also, what I look forward to is that it sounds like there were discussions about people not being able to afford medication, and we're hoping to see support for our plan around having a universal national strategy that's respectful to all provinces and all territories in order to see that move forward.

I hope that answers the member's question. I look forward to continuing this discussion.

• (1155)

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I believe the way I interpret those comments is that, yes, that conversation about compensation for people could happen at another occasion if that were something that members felt. Obviously, then, that would indicate to me that the idea of trying to recognize with a title of some kind the role that both of the other opposition parties are playing would certainly be sufficient to recognize that, and it isn't about the money. That's certainly what I hope I understood in those comments.

If that's the case, hopefully, we'll have support for the amendment. Given the advice that I received about the act and the way there's a sort of an anomaly in there, with no one ever having thought that there might be a third, fourth, fifth and sixth, etc., vice-chair, I do believe there is a way we could make just a slight change to the wording here and make this amendment work in order to have the effect that it was intended to have.

Simply, in the part where it talks about the "member not selected for the position of second vice-chair be given the title of", rather than that, it would just be—and I'm open for suggestions from my colleagues in the other opposition parties if they'd like—that we could use the title of "deputy vice-chair" or "assistant vice-chair". I'll propose "deputy vice-chair". Then that takes the language and makes it just different enough that it should meet the test of complying with the Parliament of Canada Act.

The Chair: Is everyone following in the amendment?

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm not proposing a subamendment to my own amendment. I'm just simply saying if we could have agreement to change the title from "third vice-chair" to "deputy vice-chair" that is what we'll go with.

The Chair: Where it says on the amendment "third vice-chair" we're looking at new wording, "deputy vice-chair". Is everyone in agreement here?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: We're in agreement to allow the change to the amendment.

The Chair: Is there consensus on that?

The Chair: Mr. Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Instead of changing the amendment that way, I think the most realistic solution would be to have the Conservative members rewrite their amendment to reflect the information they received from our colleagues in charge of the committee's smooth functioning. If they reworked their amendment, we could discuss it again. I'm not sure we're going about this in the right way, getting everyone's input and having four cooks in the kitchen instead of one.

They could do the homework on that and then put forward an amendment that, on top of doing what they'd like it to, would make clear that the vice-chair positions, if that's the terminology used, simply have to be compensated as such, as the House of Commons requires. I think that's their position. The original motion clearly states that the second vice-chair must be a member of the Bloc Québécois, so let me say this: we won't be making any concessions on that.

• (1200)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Therrien.

We don't have consensus on just making that change. You can't move your own amendment.

Mr. Blake Richards: Understood. I'll obviously allow one of my colleagues to make a subamendment then. It seemed like this would be an easier way to do that, but obviously without that consent, we'll do it in the complicated way then.

The Chair: Would you like to do that now? We do have a speaking order.

Mr. Blake Richards: Who would be the next speaker—Mr. Gerretsen?

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen, did you speak or did you just agree?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It was so moving that you couldn't remember it.

The Chair: It was just two words. Usually I'm used to hearing something much more elaborate.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: All I was going to say was that I was interested in hearing Ms. Blaney's take on this, but then she already spoke to that.

The Chair: Okay.

If we go back to our original list, Mr. Gerretsen, you are next.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Are we on the subamendment?

The Chair: We are on the original amendment.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I don't need to speak.

The Chair: They haven't made a subamendment. We're on the original amendment.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I don't need to speak at this time.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Chair, in light of the fact there seemingly is no consensus on the amendment, then I would move a subamendment. I will seek the clerk's advice on this. The subamendment I would move is that the "third vice-chair" be changed to strike the word "third" and replace that with the word "deputy". That would be my subamendment.

The Chair: We have a fresh list and we are on debate on the subamendment.

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Just as a question to the clerk, would a deputy vice-chair have all of the same responsibilities that come with being a vice-chair other than the pay part? Or have we just created a title and that's all we created? If so, then the point is moot.

The Chair: The issue we've been having all along is that procedurally this is okay, but as to the practical effect of it, yes, currently as it stands it would be a new title. We don't have a role in the statute for this. There is no role. It's something that we could either define here or...

I'm not quite sure if we can even do that.

• (1205)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a rhetorical question for either of your answers. One, if we're creating a position that doesn't have any responsibilities attached to it, what's the point in creating it? Two, if we're assigning the exact same responsibilities to somebody who doesn't have the official title, why would we do that? I don't understand it.

Just like with the amendment, I would really like to hear the NDP's position on this.

The Chair: Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: To Mr. Gerretsen's point, if this is truly about a title, and the work is not expected to be done in the manner in which the two vice-chairs will be doing the work, then there is no need for any additional compensation for this work—if this is truly about a title. That's the point I would want to make.

On the issue of consensus, we saw, as Mr. Richards tried to move the amendment, that there was no consensus on that with respect to the third vice-chair position being renamed deputy vice-chair. To go back to what I said last week—I'll have more to say about it later on—the convention around this place is that consensus is needed in order for anything to be changed. To change the tactics through motions, through different avenues or vehicles, is not the way we traditionally do things around here. I'm really disturbed at the direction in which we're heading on this particular matter.

The Chair: If I can be clear, Mr. Brassard, are you arguing against presenting the subamendment?

Mr. John Brassard: No. I'm just answering the point of Mr. Gerretsen and the point of my Bloc friend with respect to not allowing consensus. That's all I have to say.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen, you're back on the list.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No, thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Richards and then Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, I'll be brief on the question that was asked about a title. Essentially, that's what's being done here. Regardless of whether we call it a deputy vice-chair or we add an additional vice-chair, we're creating a new title for someone. The only reason it's a different title is due to the advice we received on procedural issues. We had to come up with something that worked for it to have the effect it was intended to have.

The bottom line here is that this is a role that didn't exist. It has never existed. It's being created. I'm simply trying to be helpful in trying to make it clear so that people don't call into question whether this was created simply to give certain members of Parliament in the smaller opposition parties extra salaries...or maybe the appearance that there could be a minority government trying to ensure that they have bi-support from one of those parties, or both. I'm not suggesting that's the case. I'm just trying to help remove that appearance by simply having a motion that allows for the recognition that I believe people are looking for here. That's what's being asked for—a recognition—and I'm trying to help provide that. It is about a title. We're trying to make sure that, for the appearance of Canadians, it doesn't appear to be about something more than that, which would be extra pay for someone.

That's the spirit of this. I certainly hope we can help remove any of those appearances [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] by having members support this.

The Chair: This exercise we're going through is getting interesting, because it seems that either way we're kind of stuck. Either we're creating just a title or, if you're not happy with the salary and you're not happy with the title, then maybe this exercise is not even going to accomplish your intentions, as you were saying, Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: That would be up to Ms. Blaney to decide, because it's her motion that was moved.

The Chair: We can go back to that original motion, and then this committee can decide the fate of that motion, but first we'd have to now vote on the subamendment and the amendment. We can continue. That would be the next logical step. I think we should do that considering that we've heard from most parties.

We'll hear from Ms. Blaney. That way, we will have heard from the NDP as well, and then we can move forward.

• (1210)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think it's interesting that there's a sort of want to put some responsibility on the NDP for the motion we brought forward.

Again, I will just say this. There was a motion brought forward in the House of Commons through the Conservatives to set up a committee with three vice-chairs. There was a decision to make that, so when it's said that role was not created, it has been created, which has led us in a direction to have a discussion.

Again, I will say this. The purpose of the motion that I have put forward is to create an environment of collaboration with the House of Commons. It seems to me, based on the advice of the clerk and the analyst, that this is a place where these are nice discussions to have, but that will not do what was intended by these motions.

As I said earlier, I think it's an interesting conversation. Perhaps we can have it in a place that actually has the authority to do something with it. I think these kind of conversations are always meaningful.

I want to be clear again. This is about a modification. This is not a fundamental change to the Standing Orders. I just think that needs to be respected and also that all the roles of the parties are respected. This is what we're looking for in this motion.

I'm happy to continue the discussion. I think it's an important discussion. I certainly hope that by the end of committee today we have some resolution.

The Chair: Monsieur Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I have nothing to add.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: I apologize, Madam Chair. The challenge—and I listened to Ms. Blaney—and the issue with the Canada-China motion is that it was a motion that was put forward on an opposition day and that was supported by the opposition parties, including the NDP and the Bloc. Let's not conflate the fact that this was a Conservative issue. This was voted on by the House.

The direction of the House of Commons was for the China-Canada committee to be constituted to study the issues with respect to the relations with China. It was a direction of Parliament—not a standing committee, not a standing order—and it was within the purview of that committee to determine whether there was going to be a third vice-chair. They did that. The Standing Orders are much different.

This motion that Ms. Blaney has put forward speaks specifically to changing the Standing Orders for this 43rd Parliament. That's the issue here. I wanted to make sure that was very clear as we move forward, not just in dealing with the subamendment but with the amendment and the main motion when and if we get to that point.

Let's not conflate the issue. Let's not somehow put this on the Conservatives: that somehow the Conservatives created this third vice-chair position within this China-Canada committee. We did not do that. The committee constituted by Parliament, not by the Standing Orders, did that on their own, and one is different from the other. Let's be clear on it.

The Chair: Mr. Brassard, just going off the point you just made, even if Ms. Blaney's original motion.... Let's just say that if it were to pass in this committee, it would be then that I'd have to report it to the House. Then we would have to see if there's concurrence—agreement—from Parliament on that issue. It would have a similar effect to your opposition day. Actually, it would be even more difficult than the opposition day.

Mr. John Brassard: I'm completely aware of that.

The challenge I have with the statement that was made is the fact that it was in fact Parliament that decided to constitute the Canada-China committee. It wasn't a Conservative motion that did that. It was a majority vote in the House of Commons.

I wanted to make that very, very clear. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm a bit taken aback by the discussion, so I just want to make sure I understand what's going on. The NDP moved a motion, and the Conservatives put forward an amendment. Now we are talking about a subamendment, but none has been proposed. Would it be possible to have the subamendment read out so we can talk about it?

Perhaps it's that I'm new, but I'm a bit confused. We are discussing an amendment, a subamendment and a motion. I'm clear on the motion behind the amendment, but I'd very much like my Conservative friends to provide something in writing so we have something concrete to work from.

• (1215)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, I just want to say, Madam Chair, that I would agree with what the member from the Bloc is saying, specifically about the structure in which we should be debating this. We should be debating it at the subamendment level and then the amendment level, but we seem to be just all over the place. I would agree that it needs to be brought into order.

The Chair: Okay.

The subamendment is in order. It's been moved from the floor, so we are on discussion of the subamendment. It is procedurally okay to move that subamendment from the floor.

You have the amendment before you. Is that correct, Monsieur Therrien?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Yes, I have the amendment.

[English]

The Chair: Yes. The subamendment to that....

Maybe the clerk can explain better using the French version.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Forgive me. I'm new, and I'm trying to learn how things work. Why is the subamendment spoken and not in writing? I'm having a bit of trouble following because I much prefer to have something in front of me.

Where I'm from—the Quebec National Assembly—we always had amendments and subamendments in writing. It strikes me as a clearer way of doing things.

I say this with all due respect for my Conservative colleagues. It would be better if we could follow them more easily. Right now, we can't fully partake in the debate when some basic elements are missing.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Therrien, I am absolutely sympathetic and understand what you're saying, especially as a new member at this federal committee. Regularly things are done in writing and you have them before you, but when a subamendment is moved, it can be done from the floor and we do have our fantastic interpretation here, which we can benefit from. Then we can read it over and over again until everyone is comfortable and understands what the subamendment is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I know we have access to interpretation. As I said earlier, I just want to be able to follow the discussion more easily. I'm used to having a document to refer to, something that would have said "delete the word 'third'" and so forth. That's all I'm saying.

I wasn't trying to disparage anyone. I was simply wondering whether this was normal procedure for subamendments or whether it might be a better idea to put it all in writing so that everyone's job was easier and we could follow along with greater ease.

You heard it here first: if I ever have any amendments or subamendments to put forward, they'll be written down and handed out to you. Now I'll wait to hear what you have to say. I think we can have clearer discussions going forward.

I have to say that one of the Conservative members—I don't know who—brought me over the information. I must have seemed like a lost soul. Everything's fine now.

It didn't have anything to do with the interpretation. It's just that I'm not used to proceeding this way. I'm new, so forgive me if I disrupt things. That's not what I'm trying to do.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, Madam Chair, if something is being distributed to one member, it should be distributed to all members if it's considered official correspondence of the committee.

The Chair: Okay.

While the subamendment is being distributed, Mr. Brassard, you're next on the list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Brassard: I have just one question, Madam Chair. Can we suspend for five minutes to change the word? It's quickly done, "deputy vice-chair".

• (1220)

[*English*]

The Chair: The copies are currently being distributed so I think we've resolved this issue at the moment.

Mr. John Brassard: Oftentimes we change words in subamendments. We're certainly not trying to undermine the privilege of members. It's just that these things happen. We have the option of suspending the meeting and then changing the wording if we have to.

The Chair: I'll put this out to the committee. Would you like to suspend momentarily while the copies are being distributed? No.

Next on the list is Mr. Turnbull and it's on the subamendment. Once we complete debate on the subamendment, we can then vote on that subamendment. Of course, my preference would be to move the ball forward so that we can resolve some of the issues that we have before us today.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): I have just a couple of points for clarification. Is it within PROC's mandate and authority to make minor modifications to the Standing Orders, i.e., to the number of vice-chairs? I would like clarification from the clerk if possible.

The Chair: I believe this issue came up at the last meeting as well. Yes, it is entirely within PROC's mandate to review the Standing Orders, to amend the Standing Orders, to discuss and debate an issue with regard to the Standing Orders here and to recommend those changes to the House.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Great. In terms of the Parliament of Canada Act as I understand it, titles and salaries are determined by that act, right, and not by PROC. Is that true?

The Chair: Currently titles and salaries are listed in that act, yes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: In fact by essentially changing the title from vice-chair to deputy vice-chair we're side-stepping or creating a new position that is not within the mandate of this committee.

Mr. Blake Richards: The third vice-chair doesn't exist either.

The Chair: In the act right now there is no first, second, or third vice-chair; it's just vice-chair. Within the Standing Orders, yes, there is a first and second vice-chair that gets elected, but within the Parliament of Canada Act it's not differentiated. However, titles do exist in this place that are not under the act.

The Board of Internal Economy and its bylaws create different positions as well. Therefore, not every position is within the act.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you for the clarification.

The Chair: It looks like everyone has had their say on the subamendment. Can we call the subamendment for a vote?

Mr. Blake Richards: I just wanted to say a few more things.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I want to just make it really clear. There seems to be a lot of confusion for some reason about the idea of a third vice-chair versus the deputy vice-chair versus what exists now, which is nothing. There is no other. Granted that we have to make this change to be able to have the intent work because of the Parliament of Canada Act indicating vice-chairs. The only reason there's no contemplation of having a third vice-chair or a deputy vice-chair is because nobody ever foresaw that. The way things have always operated, and I believe within the Standing Orders, is that there's a first vice-chair and a second vice-chair. The first vice-chair is always a member of the official opposition. The second vice-chair is always a member of another opposition party. There has never been a third vice-chair on standing committees. There has never been a deputy vice-chair.

No matter what we do, we're creating a new position. This is being done because we have a situation where there are two official opposition parties and they both wish to have members recognized in some way. In order to do that, we have to create a new position, a third vice-chair or a deputy vice-chair, whatever you want to call it, in order to make it work. To have the effect that we're trying to achieve with the amendment, we'd have to call it "deputy vice-chair" or "third vice-chair", but the bottom line is that we're creating a new position that's never existed on standing committees before in one way or the other.

I certainly was not a believer that we should be doing that, especially by a motion like this. Rather, it should be something that should be done with consensus. That didn't happen. We're coming forward with a motion and it appears to me as though it has the support to pass. I'm simply trying to make an amendment here that will clarify in peoples minds that this is not about extra pay for somebody. This is not about the government's trying to buy the support of a party. This is about simply having a new position to give recognition to both of the other opposition parties. In making this amendment, that's what we're doing. If we don't make that amendment, then it leaves the question in some peoples minds as to what is the purpose. Is it simply to make sure that both of these other caucuses get pay that other MPs don't?

● (1225)

The Chair: Mr. Therrien. No?

Okay, seeing that the list is completed for the subamendment, I call the question on the subamendment.

Mr. John Brassard: Could we have a recorded vote?

The Chair: It will be a recorded vote.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We're back to the amendment as it was originally proposed by Mr. Richards. There is no speaking list.

Oh, you'd like to be on it?

Okay, I just want to remind you, as we stated before, that if this amendment were to pass at this committee, essentially it would be moot because we cannot supersede the Parliament of Canada Act, which states that vice-chairs are to be paid a salary.

Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: I want to call the vote on the amendment.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Blake Richards: Could we have a recorded vote?

The Chair: It will be a recorded vote on the amendment.

(Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Now we are back to the original motion that Ms. Blaney put forward, and we have a speaking list for this motion. We will resume debate on that.

I can add you to that list, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead on the original motion.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I don't have anything to say at this point, Madam Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: I don't have anything to say.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I have another amendment to make. It was unfortunate that the committee—other parties—chose not to agree to the amendment that would have clarified that this is not about money but simply about recognition. Now that is left being called into question, certainly, and that's unfortunate.

I hope we can all agree at least that the situation that can now arise, and almost certainly will arise, is that we could see some MPs being eligible for two additional salaries rather than simply one additional salary that they voted for themselves. We want to try to make sure we don't create further inequity here.

I would suggest amending the motion by just adding the following:

That a vice-chair eligible for more than one additional salary under sections 62.1 to 62.3 of the Parliament of Canada Act shall only receive one of the additional salaries for which he or she is eligible.

● (1230)

The Chair: Our version isn't like that. I just want to clarify that the motion be amended by adding the following:

That a vice-chair eligible for more than one additional salary under sections 62.1 to 62.3 of the Parliament of Canada Act shall only receive one of the additional salaries for which he or she is eligible.

Is that correct?

Mr. Blake Richards: That's correct.

The Chair: Now we're going to distribute that to everybody. I just wanted to clarify whether that was even correct, but the additional word needs to be added in.

Have you added the word in?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: As this is being distributed, can we suspend just for five minutes?

The Chair: Is everyone okay with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. We're suspending for five minutes.

• (1230) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1235)

The Chair: Order.

I believe everyone should have the new amendment before them. While we were on recess, perhaps the members got to discuss and take a look at and reflect on this new amendment. We've definitely discussed it.

We're resuming debate on the amendment that is before us. There are concerns that, once again, are very similar to the concerns about the original amendment as to how this would practically play out procedurally. It is before this committee, so procedurally this amendment can be moved at this committee and can be debated.

Perhaps I would suggest that, upon reading the act, once again, on the salaries when you hold a position, it says that you "shall be paid" the salary that is listed in the act, so I believe this faces complications similar to those faced by the first amendment. We could pass it here at this committee. Even if the House were to adopt it, it would essentially not have the effect of changing the act, so we have that same problem.

Of course, that is something you can debate, and it probably will help you in making a decision as to whether you're going to vote in favour of this amendment or not.

We'll resume debate on this amendment. Those are the things that you can discuss and decide.

Mr. Therrien.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me say one thing. I am House leader of the Bloc Québécois and a vice-chair of this committee. As I understand it, then, if the committee agrees to this amendment—

[*English*]

The Chair: Can I ask you a practical question, then? We were discussing that up here at the front.

We don't oftentimes see a member who is chair of two committees or vice-chair of two committees. As the leader in the House and a vice-chair, will you be receiving two different salaries?

Mr. Alain Therrien: It's supposed to be, but...

[*Translation*]

That's why I wanted to comment. I was told that I would receive two salaries, one for my role as House leader and one for my role as vice-chair, if I'm not mistaken.

Since this motion applies to me, which puts me in somewhat of a conflict of interest, I won't comment and I will abstain from the debate. I don't want people to get any ideas.

That's what I wanted to say at the outset. I'm not going to participate, and I'll vote for an abstention.

[*English*]

The Chair: From debate or from voting on the—

Mr. Alain Therrien: I will vote on that for the Bloc Québécois.

The Chair: Okay. Understood.

Mr. Tochor.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Thank you.

I'm posing the question: who else would be getting the extra top-up? I'm not sure if any of the Liberal members would take that approach as well. To hear from the NDP on how they would approach this debate and vote would be interesting.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Again, I don't know how to speak to this. At this point, of course, I am the whip and am not the vice-chair of anything at this point, so I receive one salary. I think we could definitely ask some questions about whether or not people have been allotted those roles and also have the vice-chair role. If they're paid, I think that's a bigger research question. I obviously don't have access to the House knowledge on that, but I would be very interested in seeing what that is.

I can only answer from where I'm sitting right now, which is that for me at the end of the day this was an opportunity to have equality within our committees. I don't see a problem with this sub-amendment. I am concerned, of course, that it's not going to do the work that we would like to see it do, and I think that conversation needs to happen if that's information that the Conservatives would like to look at historically. I wouldn't have all of the knowledge about what the practice has been in this Parliament or in past Parliaments.

The Chair: Monsieur Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I want to make sure I understand correctly. Is the question whether people could find themselves in two paid positions? Is that the question?

I said I wouldn't comment, but I did anyway.

[*English*]

The Chair: I believe the list could be quite long.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I took a quick poll, and I think that, if every committee had a Bloc Québécois vice-chair, two other people would be in the same boat: doing two jobs, shall we say.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Yes, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Obviously, we've just had one member who could potentially be in a conflict here indicate that he believes he's in a conflict and will not be participating in the debate or voting on it. We have another member who could potentially be in a conflict.

My interpretation of what she's saying is that she's uncertain as to what the situation is on that right now. I don't really want to put anyone in that position. I think at this point we should adjourn debate and allow those members a chance to go back and get advice on whether or not they in fact would be in a conflict of interest.

I move that we adjourn debate.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney.

• (1245)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Would that be adjourning or just suspending debate? I'm looking for clarity on that.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Does it pick up next time?

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, it's the same situation we were in last time on your motion. Adjourning it would mean that this committee meeting for today is over—or the debate is over, sorry. It would be up to the committee the next time to pick this debate back up or not.

A helpful suggestion was made by the clerk that we could have House administration here to clarify these things. Once again, though, I want to preface it by saying that the exercise we're doing on this amendment may be moot once it gets to the House. We do have to understand that as well in considering how much time we want to spend in this committee debating this and understanding it

better. Practically, it may not have an effect; I do want to remind you of that. I feel I have a responsibility to let you know that before we carry on down that road. But we can. It's up to you; it's your decision.

Since Mr. Richards has moved to adjourn debate on the matter, that issue is not debatable.

Mr. Blake Richards: Can we have a recorded vote?

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Chair, given that we have only 10 minutes left in the scheduled meeting, I move that we adjourn the meeting.

The Chair: I've been so involved in the interesting topics we've been talking about today, but we have a former member of PROC in the committee room today. Mr. Graham is here. I'm sure the committee would like to welcome Mr. Graham. He was an excellent member of this committee for many, many years.

Welcome to the meeting, Mr. Graham.

There's been a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Can we have a vote on that? All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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